

**NEWS MEDIA GATEKEEPING ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS: A STRATEGY FOR  
ENHANCING BRAND PERSONALITY AND NEWS DIFFUSION**

by

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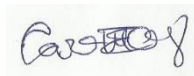
Degree: DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN COMMUNICATION SCIENCE

### **NEWS MEDIA GATEKEEPING ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS: A STRATEGY FOR ENHANCING BRAND PERSONALITY AND NEWS DIFFUSION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This cross-sectional qualitative mixed-methods study explores how news media organisations employ their gatekeeping activities to brand their news outlets and, subsequently, how the brand helps to diffuse their news stories. The focus is primarily on how radio in Ghana has capitalised on technological advancement to create an online presence through radio online digital brand extensions, thus increasing their news outlet's availability to media audiences for enhanced news dissemination. This coincides with the burgeoning emergence of digital content creators facilitated by technological advancement in the media space, resulting in traditional media losing its position as the sole news source and agenda setter. This notwithstanding, the gatekeeping performed by traditional media outlets and their credibility built over the years was found to sustain them in the digital era.

Situated within the interpretive research paradigm, this exploratory mixed-method study is approached qualitatively, with the quantitative aspect serving an auxiliary role. It is informed by the gatekeeping and signalling theories. It purposively samples six online digital news media brands made up of three radio online brand extensions, namely myjoyonline.com, peacefmonline.com and citifmonline.com, and three solely online digital news brands, namely newsghana24.com, mynewsghana.net and modernghana.com. The research design used the NodeXL software to collect quantitative data from the Twitter handles of the six online digital brands to plot 24 network visualisation graphs over one month. This is followed by semi-structured interviews with the online news editors, social media managers and social media curators of the six news organisations.

The study establishes that traditional media brand extensions are greatly advantaged in the digital era compared to their solely online digital brand counterparts. The brand identities built by traditional media through their normative gatekeeping decisions has translated into large audience followings on their digital media platforms. They are observed to follow a journalistic branding orientation. Solely online digital brands on the other hand follow a marketing brand orientation and they capitalise on their digital presence to improve their finances and sustainability. The study makes a two-fold recommendation to radio online digital brands on one hand and to solely online digital media brands on the other.

## **KEY TERMS**

Brand personality; gatekeeping theory; news diffusion; online digital platforms; online news media gatekeepers; professional gatekeeping; public/citizen/online user gatekeeper; radio online digital brand extension; signalling theory; traditional media gatekeepers

## ISISHWANKATHELO

Ngokusebenzisa iindlela zophando ezixutyiweyo, esi sifundo siphonononga indlela amaqumrhu eendaba asebenzisa ngayo ukuhlela njengecebo lokuzakhela igama, kwaye xa selidumile elo gama liqhuba njani ekusasazeni iindaba. Kugxininiswa kwindlela amajelo osasazo ngonomathotholo eGhana abusebenzisa ngayo ubuchwepheshe ekuveleni kumaza omoya ngokwenza iminatha yonomathotholo omanyelwa kwi-intanethi, ngaloo ndlela kube kusandiswa amathuba okufumana iindaba kubaphulaphuli ngokomeleza iinkqubo zosasazo lweendaba. Oku kungqamana nokuhluma okunwenwayo kwabaqulunqi bemixholo ngobuchwepheshe bedijithali, nto leyo idala ukuba amajelo osasazo abefudula ekhona alahlekelwe yindawo yawo yesiqhelo apho ebekade ewodwa ekusasazeni iindaba nasekusekeni iajenda. Noxa kunjalo, indlela yokuhlela iindaba, esetyenziswa ngamajelo akudala nokuthembeka kwawo eluntwini okudaleke emva kweminyaka emininzi, kwenza ukuba la majelo angagqumeleleki kweli xesha lobuchwepheshe bedijithali.

Esi sifundo sisebenzise amava abathathi nxaxheba nezinye iindlela ezininzi zophando kwaye sivelelwe ngenkalo yokuzathuza, lo gama inkalo yokusebenzisa amanani inendima eyidlalileyo nayo ekuncediseni uphando. Kuqwalaselwe iingcingane zokuhlela nokusasaza. Kuthathwe isampulu ngononophelo kumajelo eendaba edijithali amathandathu akhiwe ngeminatha emithathu yonomathotholo ofumaneka kwi-intanethi. La majelo ngala: *myjoyonline.com*, *peacefmonline.com*, *citifmonline.com*, namathathu angawomoya qha angala: *newsghana24.com*, *mynewsghana.net*, *modernghana.com*. Uyilo lophando lwasebenzisa isixhobo sobuchwepheshe esiyiNodeXL ekuqokeleleni iinkcukacha zolwazi ngokuqwalasela amanani, kumaqonga onxibelelwano lweTwitter kumajelo amathandathu, kwaqulunqwa iigrafu zababukeli ezingama-24 kwixesha elingangenyanga. Kwalandeliswa ngeendliwano ndlebe ezingaqingqwanga ngokupheleleyo nabahleli beendaba, abaphathi bamaqonga onxibelelwano, abagcini bamaqonga onxibelelwano amaqumrhu eendaba amathandathu amatsha.

Isifundo safumanisa ukuba iminatha yosasazo yakudala inamandla kwixesha ledijithali xa ithelekiswa nale iyidijithali qwaba. Amajelo osasazo akudala selezenzele igama kwaye ukwaziwa kwamagama awo neendlela ahlela ngazo iindaba kukhokelela ekufumaneni abaphulaphuli abaninzi kumaqonga awo edijithali. Abonakala elandela icebo lokusebenzisa ukwaziwa kwagama. Amajelo edijithali qwaba wona alandela icebo lokuququzelela ukwazisa igama kwaye axhathise ngokuba nawo ekhona kumaza edijithali ukuze akhulise imali yawo nozinzo. Esi sifundo senze iingcebiso ezimacala mabini, okokuqala kumajelo oonomathotholo bedijithali, okwesibini kumajelo edijithali qwaba.

## AMAGAMA APHAMBILI

Igosa elimele igama leshishini; ingcingane yokuhlela; ukusasaza iindaba; amaqonga obuchwepheshe bedijithali; abahleli beendaba ezisasazwa ngeintanethi; ukuhlela ngobungcali; uluntu/ummi/umsebenzisi weintanethi ongumhleli; ukwandisa usasazo loonomathotholo ngamaza edijithali; ingcingane yosasazo; abahleli bamajelo akudala

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

#### Contextualising the origin and research problem of the study

##### 1.1 Introduction

The advent of the digital media age was anticipated to end traditional media gatekeepers (Bullard 2013:3) by sending “a signal to the world that old media empires are modern-day dinosaurs headed for extinction” (Thierer 1999:5). It opened up the gatekeeping function to everybody who had access to the internet and a network device (Bullard 2013:3; Welbers & Opgenhaffen 2018:4731). This resulted in a multiplicity of news streams that lost traditional news media the news creation and distribution monopoly (Shoemaker & Vos 2009). With the increase in news creators and distributors who publish anything they deem newsworthy, the value of professional journalistic gatekeeping of online digital news media platforms becomes a subject for discussion and worth investigating. This is because, news and information publishing within traditional media are subjected to professionally accepted news values bound by journalistic work such as objectivity, balance and fairness. One would expect that because these normative journalistic values were followed in print media, radio and television, new online digital media spaces would follow the trend. Online digital media, however, present a game-changing experience, with vastly different challenges. This is largely because of the different levels of content producers it embraces, who may not necessarily be abreast of these news values.

News production is no longer unidirectional from journalists to audiences (Vos 2015:7). Thus, establishing the assumption that the gatekeeping roles and functions performed by traditional news media outlets are now irrelevant and outdated. The abundance of

news channels such as blogs, online news websites and social media, have set the boundary work performed by journalists under constant struggle. Securing those boundaries seems urgent and challenging in the face of technological advancements and the active participation of media audiences in the news process. The effect being that, while some scholars have suggested that there are no more gatekeepers in the digital era (Williams & Carpini 2004; Kovach & Rosenstiel 2001); others have advocated that everybody is a gatekeeper (Shoemaker & Vos 2009; Welbers & Opgrnhaffen 2018:4731). Given this difficulty, journalism has struggled to maintain its credibility and position as the most influential news source in guiding the public and political agenda (Van Dalen & Van Aeist 2013; Tan & Weaver 2007).

While the theory of gatekeeping might be considered in transition, having evolved from White's (1950) simple theory into network and digital gatekeeping theories in the digital era, the same cannot be said about the gatekeeping concept and metaphor. The evolution of gatekeeping theory has been championed on the merit that, over time, various gatekeeping theories were not adequate in analysing gatekeeping functions and roles fueled by technology. Subsequent cultural and political pressures, coupled with professional and technological advancements in the media after White's (1950) theorisation of gatekeeping, rendered his seminal, ground-breaking study inadequate to account for every stakeholder who influenced media content. Successive theories, like the Hierarchy of Influences model (Shoemaker 1991; Shoemaker & Reese 1996; 2014), accounted for additional levels of influencers beyond White's (1950) conceptualisation of the news editor as the sole influencer of media content. The digital era presents newer challenges requiring digital and network gatekeeping theories to

address the gatekeeping gaps identified in reference to the multichannel and diverse content producers it presents.

Viewed as a concept or metaphor, gatekeeping involves every process aimed at transforming information about events into news stories. Whether in the traditional or digital media environment, performed by 'traditional media gatekeepers', 'online news media gatekeepers' or 'public/citizen/online user gatekeepers', the concept or metaphor of gatekeeping remains unchanged; that is, the creation and distribution of news stories. While the theory continues to metamorphose to adapt to changes in the media environment, the concept or metaphor remains resolute both in traditional and digital media.

Gatekeeping may be applied differently by various media stakeholders depending on the branding strategy they adopt, although the intention of making information widely available may be the same. For traditional media gatekeepers, as well as online news media gatekeepers without traditional media affiliation, gatekeeping may follow acceptable professional and normative procedures to ensure objectivity, fairness and balance. However, the intended brand personality to be portrayed to the audience dictates the delicate and detailed gatekeeping decisions and activities. While traditional media gatekeepers are often perceived to pursue journalistic media branding decisions by focusing on quality and credible news, solely online news media gatekeepers are known to follow commercially- or market-driven media branding decisions in a bid to survive (Siegert, Gerth & Rademacher 2011). Public/citizen/online-user gatekeepers, on the other hand, publish what they deem



newsworthy and informative for their intended audiences, though this may not follow any professional or normative news routines. This could be information they create themselves, information adapted for sharing from other sources or information adopted wholesale from other sources and redistributed to their audiences. Beyond creating and sharing information, traditional media gatekeepers and some online digital media gatekeepers perform other indispensable duties. This includes cross-checking facts before publication, which may not be performed by public/citizen/online-user gatekeepers. For the purpose of this study, gatekeeping will be defined by adapting various definitions to mean the process of selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating, and otherwise massaging information to become news (Donohue, Tichenor & Olien 1972:43; Shoemaker, Johnson, Seo & Wang 2010; Shoemaker, Vos & Reese 2008:124).

From the definition above, gatekeeping theory may have evolved over time, but the metaphorical understanding of gatekeeping prior to the digital era may not differ from what the digital era presents. So that, even in the digital era, gatekeeping is as essential as it used to be in the pre-digital era, with the underlying relevance and application unchanged. It may, therefore, seem confirmatory to exercise some form of caution in the hailing of technological advancement. This is because, while the digital media era provides advantages, the many “awe-inspiring possibilities of the digital age” (Heinderyckx 2015:262) may only be theoretical in many instances. Normative gatekeeping remains important due to the abundance of fake news, non-journalistic social media and click bait (Blom & Hansen 2015) set to lure audiences to news sites.

On the backdrop of technological innovation, media evolution has not been limited to the process of transforming information like gatekeeping theory, but also the media channels. Traditional news media outlets that preserved the exclusivity of public information and agenda setting have also had to transform to remain relevant. Radio, a widespread mass medium due to its economical relevance and accessibility among other traditional media sources, has had its fair share of competition to stay pertinent in the digital space.

In Africa, and Ghana in particular, radio is not just a mass medium. It carries socio-economic, as well as cultural significance (Myers 2008). This is especially true among rural and illiterate folk, who greatly depend on community radio for information. Additionally, it can be used in areas where there is no electricity (Myers 2008). This relevance notwithstanding, radio faces stiff competition in the digital era to retain old audiences while attracting new ones. This world-wide phenomenon has ensured that, although radio continues to remain the most widespread medium across African countries including Ghana (Afrobarometer 2020; Ghana Statistical Service 2012; National Communications Authority & Ghana Statistical Service 2020), the listening population continues to dwindle; especially among urban population and the youth. While radio has proven to be a resilient mass communication tool in the face of technological changes (Oliveira, Stachyra & Starkey 2014), it has now seen a massive reduction in time spent listening (TSL), especially among millennials (Miller 2017). Old media processes have proven not to be sustainable in the digital era, unable to meet the news needs of different segments of audiences as “peoples’ relationship to news is becoming portable and participatory” (Pew 2010d). Consequently, radio, a medium born to broadcast content, has had to innovate by adapting to a paradigm shift so as

to 'listen' to its audiences to remain relevant (Sellas & Bonini 2014:79) or face extinction. Through a hybridisation process, where its services are converged with the internet and mobile phone technologies, radio conventions, content creation chains and professional routines have been altered by the dynamics of the social web (Podger 2009; Sellas & Bonini 2014).

The strong presence and prominence established by FM radio stations on digital platforms has helped them to live up to the competition. This has been achieved by merging their services with new media to create digital brand extensions like online news websites and social media platforms. FM radio stations now have digital news platforms to publish their news stories, as well as social media accounts through which they interact with audiences, host live radio shows, and reach out to their audiences with links to news stories aiming to route traffic to their web pages (Messner, Linke, Eford 2011; Sellas & Bonini 2014).

Affirming this practice on Ghanaian radio, Avle (2016:164) attests that "it is striking how fluidly programme hosts move across multiple conversations — with audiences via text and online sources, with co-presenting studio hosts, as well as with phoned-in public officials or journalists". It is common practice in Ghana for radio programme discussions to start on social media before the commencement of the live programme. Programme hosts post topics for discussions on social media and audiences begin interactions there. On-air conversations with audiences continue through phone-in sessions, with social media posts being read alongside. Even after the live interactions, it is common-practice for discussions to continue on social media (Avle

2016; Deo-Silas 2013:8). These platforms and practices, theorised as the evolution of the public sphere (Sellas & Bonini 2014:66), present a convergence of traditional media with new media. Sellas and Bonini (2014:66) are of the view that interaction between radio hosts and their audiences before, during and after live shows is:

an evolution of the public sphere, where users change the dynamics of publishing and distributing content...[where] the logic of mass media converges with the new communication practices of consumers who, via technology, intervene in the flow of information and interact with professionals and other citizens.

While this practice may suggest a mutual relationship between FM radio stations and their audiences, there are also social media platforms where news stories are carried without passing through journalistic gates. These platforms compete with journalists as major news sources. In the face of competition from audiences and other online digital news media outlets without traditional media affiliation, radio, like other traditional news media outlets, even those on digital platforms, have not exclusively adopted the innovations of the digital era. Rather, they have adapted new media innovations to their traditional media settings. They are protecting their editorial autonomy and professional credibility by holding on to a key aspect of their work which not everyone can perform – professional and normative gatekeeping, as a means to distinguish their news stories. On digital platforms where there is a temptation to want to be the first to break news stories, radio brand extensions continue to confirm and systematically seek other sides to their news stories through traditional and professional radio journalism to produce balanced, objective, accurate and credible news stories. This is done in spite of the fact that some channels may be reluctant to confirm stories and sources. The traditional news function has been critiqued as needing a new conceptualisation in the digital era (Welbers & Opgnhaffen 2018). However, due to the multidirectional flow of news and the abundance of news channels, holding on to this normative responsibility has helped to build brands for

traditional media organisations, even in digital settings (Heinderyckx & Vos 2016; Philips 2015). As a result, even on digital media platforms, radio and other traditional media outlets serve as sources of credible news stories, avenues for viral news verification and the reliable alternative amidst the many news channels available to digital news audiences (Bosch 2014; Brandtzæg et al 2015; Bruns 2003; Nielsen 2014).

The targeted audiences of radio online digital brand extensions are the younger segment of the population below 40 years of age and especially those born in the 1990s. Those often called “true digital natives” (Miller 2017:4). Though the younger generation are generally “uninterested in AM/FM radio and prefer(s) the increased interactivity and personalization [*sic*] of digital services” (Miller 2017:4), radio online digital brand extensions fill the gap for traditional radio in meeting these needs. In their activities, however, the boundary work is upheld to ensure editorial autonomy. In Ghana, for instance, Avle (2016:166) notes those between 18 and 35 years old mostly satisfy their news and music needs online. But even then, radio digital brand extensions have adapted their websites and social media sites, like Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp, to their existing journalistic routines instead of adjusting their practices to social media innovations (Halpern & Gibbs 2013; Lasorsa, Lewis & Holton 2011). This has ensured that radio online brand extensions adhere to high professional standards and cover the most relevant news stories. Subsequently, audiences perceive traditional news media and their online brand extensions as credible news sources, so audiences share their news stories with connections in their personal networks (Kwon, Oh, Agrawal & Rao 2012). This practice of news sharing within personal networks of online news audiences has contributed to diffusing the news

stories of radio stations, especially among the younger population.

Among the many factors that could contribute to building brand personality in the media, the gatekeeping function which has been studied from a number of perspectives, is crucial. However, it is often not regarded in brand personality dimension models. Brand building is dependent on focusing on elements of differentiation that distinguishes an organisation or product from competitors in the wider market. So that, though it may be considered an advantage of the digital era that everyone is a gatekeeper (Vos & Shoemaker 2009), not everyone can perform the normative gatekeeping role of traditional media. The gatekeeping function performed by traditional news media, though theorised as out-dated in the digital gatekeeping environment, sets these news organisations apart as credible news sources, ensuring their economic survival.

A study by Tungate (2005) of twenty “media monoliths” in the United States of America, like Cable News Network (CNN), the New York Times, and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in the UK, found that, though the initial ‘shocks’ of the new media landscape challenged their existence, they rebounded because they did not lose sight of their well-established “brand heritage”. The brand heritage was built from the nature of their content, their means of distribution, the targeted audience, and other strategic branding decisions made over years. In effect, the brand heritage of these ‘media monoliths’ is “anchored in the quality of [their] customer relations, as well as the quality of [their] products” (Dowell 2011:42). Tungate (2005) observed that, one strategic core, common for all the media outlets, was that their audiences purchased their products not as mere sources of information, but as a lifestyle. This shows that

through their gatekeeping activities, these 'media monoliths' positioned their brands in the minds of their audiences so that competition from the digital era has not impacted negatively on their personality and existence.

Online digital brand extensions of traditional media often do not have cause to think about survival because of their established parent brands which often support their finances. Thus, they are able to continue to engage in critical and journalistic-driven gatekeeping. Solely online digital brands without traditional media affiliation, on the other hand, often engage in commercially-driven gatekeeping to survive. McDowell (2011:48) observed that few media organisations have huge profits, but the more established ones have a greater advantage of survival over smaller ones since they are favoured by audiences. The longer audiences stayed with a media outlet, the greater the cash inflow as they stayed on their platforms, and the more other business organisations advertised with them. A study by the Pew Research Centre (2010b) found that most online news users claimed not to have a favourite and so shuffled between news sites. However, of the few that did, online news outlets of major news organisations topped the list of favourites. Similar findings had previously been observed by the Nielsen Media Research (2009).

Although technological advancement has reduced the barriers to entry of content creators and distributors (Küng 2008), an "Overabundance of choice is not necessarily what people want...Fortunately, one common cognitive shortcut is to depend on trusted brand names" (McDowell 2011:43). Research suggests that most solely online digital news media outlets and other news channels including audiences, deem traditional news media outlets as credible news sources. As such, they redistribute

their news by re-posting news stories and links on their personal social media networks and platforms (Boczkowski & De Santos 2007; Bruns 2005; Pew Research Center 2010a; 2010b). Thus, facilitating the wider reach of the news stories of traditional news media to audiences. It has been argued that, while solely online digital news platforms and audiences may contribute to the distribution of a diversity of viewpoints, the nature of news content reaching the public sphere has not changed significantly. This is because much of the news in circulation on digital media platforms originate within traditional media, produced by professional journalists (Heinderyckx & Vos 2016:31, 33; Nielsen 2014).

This suggests that traditional media outlets retain a higher level of credibility, which makes audiences recognise them as authentic news sources. Could the professional gatekeeping function of traditional news media contain an undisclosed benefit which inspires the need to build a brand personality? And does the brand personality built influence or aid the diffusion of news stories amongst their audiences via users' personal networks in the competitive digital era?

This study, first, aimed at contributing to the body of literature on gatekeeping theorisation by dealing with the question of the importance of normative gatekeeping, especially on online digital news platforms. This is necessary because, in an environment where news channels abound, some content producers may not be willing to take on the extra gatekeeping responsibility. Second, the study placed emphasis on the way building brand image, identity and personality for their media outlets motivate journalists to uphold their credibility through professional and normative gatekeeping practices; which results in a large audience base and an



increase in the diffusion of their news stories. This was done by exploring the way normative gatekeeping roles and functions are performed on online digital brand extensions and associated social media platforms by radio stations in Ghana. This is compared to those performed by solely online digital news media websites and their associated social media platforms to assess how gatekeeping has contributed to building brand personality that distinguishes the radio outlets. Finally, by comparing the social media accounts (Twitter) of three radio online digital brand extensions with three stand-alone online digital news channels in Ghana, the study assessed the extent to which brand personality aids the diffusion of news stories of online digital media brands within their audiences' personal networks.

## **1.2 Brief historical background of radio in Ghana**

An understanding of a country's "media landscape is lost without looking into the historical context from which it originates" (Milton and Fourie 2015:1). This is generally because the media in any country at any point in time is considered as a societal role player, reflecting what happens in a specific context at a particular time in history. This section, therefore, briefly outlines the history of broadcasting in Ghana.

Radio broadcasting in Ghana dates back to the colonial era in the then Gold Coast. It was introduced in 1935 by the then governor, Sir Arnold Hodson. Based in Accra, Station Zoy, as it was called, was an extension of Empire Service in London, relaying its programmes to the newly formed radio station in the colony. Transmission started on 31 July 1935 to mark the silver jubilee of King George V of the British Empire (Alhassan 2005:211-212). Station Zoy was a wired relay station and as such access

was limited. Transmission, which was strictly monitored, was to about three hundred colonial residents and privileged native elites. Service transmission was subsequently extended to Kumasi, Sekondi Takoradi, Koforidua and Cape Coast. By 1939 (during World War II), radio broadcasting had begun expanding. This resulted in the need to employ more staff and with the additional expansion to other regions of Ghana, the colonial administrators realised the need to introduce local personnel and local languages for the indigenes to benefit from the radio programming content (Ansah 1985:6; Blankson 2005:6). Five Ghanaian languages, including Akan (Twi), Ewe, Hausa, Ga and Dagbani, were therefore used on Ghanaian radio by 1940 (Blankson 2005:6). The expansion also ensured that transmissions from Station Zoy in Accra could be received in neighbouring, German-controlled, Togoland and other French West African territories (Head 1979:45). Although these countries were French speaking countries, they benefited from Station Zoy's transmissions because Ewe, Hausa and Akan languages were also indigenous to some of their citizens.

In 1954, Station Zoy was renamed the Gold Coast Broadcasting Service (GCBS), possibly to reflect the original name of Ghana, but it later became the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) after independence in 1957. Post-independence, the GBC embarked on an expansion drive extending operations to all ten administrative regions of Ghana. By the 1980s, GBC operated three national radio services, GBC 1 and 2 (Short Wave Radio) and GBC FM, with at least one radio station in all the regional capitals in Ghana. All these stations used local languages extensively, especially those spoken in their regions of operation (Boafo 1989:15-16; Boateng 2009:163).

Characterised by various demonstrations by the public, the early 1990s economic, political and social atmosphere in Ghana suggested a craving for a different media landscape. Boateng (2009:164) argues that acting as a government 'mouthpiece,' GBC had outlived its usefulness because the social, political and economic issues confronting the nation had changed, thus, motivating the liberalisation of broadcasting. People were frustrated by only hearing about government propaganda on GBC, so they wanted something different. People had become enlightened and were eager for information. The drive brought in its wake changes in the democratisation, pluralisation and decentralisation of economic and political decision-making, thus encouraging private participation. Additionally, people with interest in the media wanted Article 162 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana to be operationalised to allow freedom of expression and allow the operation of radio and television stations without licensing. This era saw the emergence of FM stations like Groove FM, Radio Eye and Joy FM. However, they broadcast in English, taking after the colonial radio broadcasting system. Other stations that emerged also followed suit in the language of operation. Arguing that while Asian and Western countries promote their local languages in radio broadcasting, Blankson (2005:2, 11) observed that Sub-Saharan countries, including Ghana, relied extensively on ex-colonial languages. Odegbenle (2013:166) reports a similar case in Nigeria, even as recently as 2013. Boateng (2009:163) affirms this trend, but Blankson (2005:11) notes that upon public criticisms in Ghana, the trend began to change with the introduction of Peace FM and later Adom FM, Obgonu FM and Happy FM<sup>1</sup>, which broadcast solely in local languages.

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<sup>1</sup>All these stations are located in Accra, the capital of Ghana.

The radio broadcasting space in Ghana was thus transformed, making it vibrant and projecting the Ghanaian culture to prominence. Local language use on radio in Ghana has been encouraged by all governments and this is reflected in the various normative media documents that have been developed by the different governments that have taken over the reign of political power. The winds of change were not limited only to Ghana, but the whole of Africa. Simpson (2008:9) observed that the percentage of African languages used on radio within this period far outstripped that which was used on other media platforms and this has grown significantly over the years.

Today, there are a number of radio stations like OTEC FM, Boss FM, Hello FM, Nhyira FM and Kessben FM, among others, in Kumasi and Oman FM and Neat FM in Accra, aside the four stated earlier, that only broadcast in local languages. Boateng (2009:161) argues that of all Ghanaian languages, Akan is the most dominant language on radio in Ghana and it has assumed national significance. This may be due to the fact that *Akans* are the dominant tribe and their language is spoken by almost all Ghanaians, native and non-native alike. Noteworthy is the fact that notwithstanding the domination of Akan, GBC uses other native languages that are prevalent in the various regions of their operations. From humble beginnings in 1996 with just a few private radio stations, the National Communications Authority (NCA) had issued broadcast licenses to 412 FM stations by the end of 2017, out of which 313 were on air (NCA 2017). Most of these FM stations broadcast in Akan and other local languages prevalent in their regions of operation.

### **1.3 The objectives of the study**

- 1 To explore the adequacy of conventional and digital gatekeeping models in analysing the gatekeeping functions and roles of radio, that distinguish them from other content producers and gatekeepers, and are used to build brand personality.
- 2 To explore the similarities and differences in gatekeeping activities performed by radio online digital brand extensions and solely online digital media brands in Ghana, that attract audiences and traffic to their online news websites.
- 3 To compare the extent of influence and degree of Twitter news diffusion between Ghanaian radio online digital brand extensions and other Ghanaian solely online news media brands.
- 4 To propose a conceptual framework to guide Ghanaian radio online digital brand extensions to consolidate their gatekeeping and brand personality building initiatives for increased news diffusion by their audiences.

### **1.4 Research questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- 1 To what extent are conventional and digital gatekeeping models suitable for the assessment of the gatekeeping functions and roles of radio, that distinguish it from other content producers and gatekeepers, and are used to build brand personality?
- 2 To what extent do the gatekeeping activities performed by radio online digital brand extensions compare with those of solely online digital brands; and, how effective are these activities in routing audience traffic to online news websites?

- 3 To what extent does the presence of Ghanaian radio online digital brand extension gatekeepers on Twitter influence their news diffusion within their audiences' personal networks compared with those of Ghanaian online digital news media gatekeepers without traditional media affiliation?
- 4 What conceptual framework can guide Ghanaian radio online digital brand extensions and solely online digital news brands in consolidating their gatekeeping and brand personality building initiatives for greater news diffusion by their audiences?

### **1.5 The research design and method**

This study contributes to the literature and debate on the relevance of gatekeeping in the digital era in the Ghanaian broadcasting context. It follows an interpretive research paradigm. It draws on research methodologies, philosophies, ideologies and epistemologies aimed at unearthing meaning in the way gatekeeping has been used by radio stations within their online digital brand extensions to build brand personalities for themselves, and how that brand helps to diffuse their news stories on online digital platforms.

The study was approached from a qualitatively-driven mixed-methods research (Creswell, Shope, Plano Clark, Green 2006; Mason 2006:9) perspective by drawing on both extensively qualitative and quantitative methods to achieve the objectives. Quantitative data collection methods helped to collect discrete data in the form of audience news diffusion activities on Twitter. The NodeXL software was used to plot network visualisation graphs to measure the extent of audience acceptance and

diffusion of news stories, videos, images and news links. Semi-structured interviewing, which is a qualitative data collection method, was applied to collect contextual and non-discrete information from the social media news curators, online news editors and social media managers of: *Peace FM Online* (*peacefmonline.com*); *Citi FM Online* (*citifmonline.com*); *Joy FM Online* (*myjoyonline.com*); *News Ghana24* (*newsghana24.com*); *Mynews Ghana* (*mynewsghana.net*); and *Modern Ghana* (*modernghana.com*). The study was situated within the Ghanaian context through an ethnographic and naturalistic perspective. The two data sets were interpreted qualitatively by embedding the quantitative data findings within the qualitative for interpretation. This was further done to understand human experiences for converged meanings and allow conclusions to be drawn.

The study employed semi-structured interviews to solicit information from online news editors, social media news curators and social media managers of radio online digital brand extensions and solely online digital media brands. The interviews explored the gatekeeping methods applied on online news websites and social media accounts, and how they compared with those employed in traditional radio. The interviews were granted in light of how the gatekeeping function helped to carve a niche for, or distinguish, Ghanaian radio digital brand extensions from other Ghanaian online-only news gatekeepers.

The purposive sampling method was used in selecting three Ghanaian radio online digital brand extensions (*peacefmonline.com*, *citifmonline.com* and *myjoyonline.com*), and three Ghanaian solely online digital news brands (*newsghana24.com*,

*mynewsghana.net* and *modernghana.com*). The NodeXL software was used to collect data on audience news sharing activities within the Twitter handles of the six online digital news platforms. This helped to plot network visualization graphs that were used to assess the extent of diffusion of news stories, images, videos and news links within the audiences' personal networks. This was made possible because Twitter audiences have the opportunity to share their opinions and share information with others within their networks. Additionally, information on Twitter is public, except when the account is private.

The qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews were analysed using thematic analysis, where various themes and sub-themes were identified. Together with the descriptive information from the graphs, meanings to the findings were given to answer the research questions. Details of the methodology are provided in Chapter Six.

## 1.6 Operational definitions

This sub-section aims at expounding the definition of some concepts applied in this study:

**Traditional media gatekeepers:** Content producers and gatekeepers working in traditional media outlets. They could also be content producers and gatekeepers working for online websites and associated social media networks that are affiliated to traditional media outlets.

**Online news media gatekeepers:** Content producers and gatekeepers working for online news websites and their associated social media networks that are not affiliated



to traditional media outlets, but which operate as stand-alone online digital news distributors.

**Public/citizen/online user gatekeeper:** Ordinary citizen/netizen internet users who can: 1) produce their own content and post it online (performing their own informal 'gatekeeping' role with regard to their own personal content); 2) adapt and distribute content from traditional media gatekeepers, online news media gatekeepers and other citizens by editing the content to suit their specifications; and 3) repost and redistribute the content of any of the other stakeholders.

**Professional gatekeeping:** selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating, and otherwise massaging information to become news (Donohue, Tichenor & Olien 1972:43; Shoemaker, Johnson, Seo & Wang 2010; Shoemaker, Vos & Reese 2008:124).

**Radio online digital brand extension:** any online digital news media outlet such as a website or social media platform operated and managed by a licenced radio station.

## **1.7 Structure of the thesis: chapter outline**

Chapter One, which is the introductory chapter, introduced the topic by providing the background to the study, emphasising the context within which the study was situated, as well as identifying the problem and its essence in the Ghanaian digital broadcasting context. It also gave a brief outline of the research method undertaken, the objectives, and research questions that guided the study.

Together, Chapters Two, Three and Four comprise the study's literature review. They assess the relevant literature on various concepts related to the study. The second chapter discusses the shift in paradigm in radio broadcasting from an era of one-way communication to an era where much attention is paid to audiences by interacting with them in a networked environment. It also discusses the adequacy of conventional, contemporary and digital gatekeeping theories and models in analysing the gatekeeping roles and functions of radio in the traditional and digital media era. Subsequently, the competitive advantage that radio brings to its online digital brand extensions, making them gatekeepers among other gatekeepers such as audiences and online news media gatekeepers of stand-alone digital news platforms, are discussed.

Chapter Three discusses branding in general, narrowing down to the way news media brand management helps achieve customer-based brand equity. It focuses on the online brand extension of radio as a strategy to meet the news needs of netizens, while, at the same time, addressing the competition resulting from the rise of the internet, technological advancement and new media advantages. The chapter further discusses the way radio online digital brand extensions continue to perform normative gatekeeping roles and functions which has distinguished them from the abundance of other news channels, thus, earning them many followers. This normative gatekeeping now serves as a brand identity tool, promoting brand power and a credibility instrument, catalysing the diffusion of news stories by radio online digital brand extensions within the personal networks of their audiences.

The fourth chapter explores the concept of brand personality, as applied in consumer product marketing and the media fraternity. Various brand personality models are studied, detailing the dimensions that make up brand personality, as theorised by various scholars within the field. The chapter then delves into the considerations made in building brand personality models and their attendant dimensions. Focusing on the theoretical foundations and implications.

The fifth chapter discusses the theoretical underpinnings of the study. The study was underpinned by the signalling and gatekeeping theories. The first theory, signalling theory (Spence 1973), focuses on how audiences are made aware of information regarding a brand. The various concepts of signalling theory, that is, the signal, the signaler/trustee, the receiver/truster and the feedback, are discussed within the context of this study.

The chapter further delves into detailed discussions of gatekeeping theory from conventional, contemporary and digital models to networked gatekeeping theories and models. The focus here is on the prominent representation of traditional mass media outlets such as radio. The chapter discusses Lewin's (1943) field theory, which emphasises the influence of gatekeepers and the environment on decision making in the various channels of food distribution. White's (1950) ground-breaking, but simple, study into media gatekeeping is also discussed. Notably, arguing that his model departed from Lewin's (1943) networked system to focus on the news editor as the major influencer on news content. This is followed by the hierarchy of influences model developed by Shoemaker (1991), which she later co-authored with Reese in 1996 and 2014. This model suggests a return to Lewin's (1943) field theory. The concluding part

of the chapter discusses digital and network gatekeeping models, which have been proposed as a panacea to the changing media landscape due to technological advancements. Finally, by drawing on, and amalgamating, the concepts of signalling theory, brand personality and gatekeeping, the chapter proposes a conceptual framework on gatekeeping and signalling in the digital era.

Chapter Six provides detailed explication of the research philosophy, processes, methods and strategies adopted to execute this study. The study adopted a qualitatively-driven mixed-method research approach, providing an interpretive perspective to the data analysis and discussions. Qualitative data was collected from online news editors, social media managers and social media curators of six purposively sampled online digital news media brands through semi-structured interviews. Sampling for online news brands was purposive to select those with specific substantial characteristics that would help achieve set objectives. The data generated was analysed using thematic analysis. Quantitative data collection and analysis methods assumed an 'auxiliary' or supportive role, helping to plot social network visualisation analysis graphs of audience news diffusion activities within the Twitter handles of the six sampled brands. This was made possible with the NodeXL software, as a means of measuring the news diffusion activities of audiences within their personal networks on Twitter. Additionally, the chapter discusses the measures employed to ensure that the four-criterion construct of trustworthiness and authenticity, that is, credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability, were achieved. Finally, the role of the researcher in minimising bias in this study is discussed.

Chapter Seven presents the data analysis procedures and findings of the study. This

includes data derived from the network graphical visualisation of audience activities on the Twitter handles of the sampled online digital media brands using the NodeXL software, and the semi-structured interview data. Data is first presented for the network visualisations which resulted in 24 distinct graphs for the six digital news outlets. Data was gathered for four weeks within one month (Twitter allows for seven days information generation), producing four graphs for each of the six online news brands. The findings indicated that radio online digital media brands had very dense networks, indicating larger followings and acceptance of their brand by their audiences than those of the solely online digital brands. However, solely online brands had higher influence on news diffusion than radio online digital brands. Subsequently, the chapter presents analysis of the data from the semi-structured interviews. Data from the semi-structured interviews were engaged inductively based on the categories in the conceptual framework formulated in Chapter Five to generate themes and sub-themes. Each data collection instrument was treated distinctively in a systematic order and separately for traditional media gatekeepers and online news media gatekeepers. This was to help ascertain the similarities and differences between the various gatekeeping, branding, signalling and news diffusion strategies.

It was established that digital media gatekeeping for traditional media was similar to that of solely online digital media. However, they had various unique features that distinguish them. These details, which are elaborated in the chapter, concluded that traditional media gatekeepers' activities were largely consistent with the journalistic branding strategy. Alternatively, online news media gatekeepers followed a largely commercial or management branding strategy.

Chapter Eight deals with the findings presented in the previous chapter to address the research questions which emerged from the objectives of the study and to give meaning to the data. This helped to conceptualise the findings regarding the gatekeeping, signalling and branding strategies of news media outlets in the digital era. While also generating a conceptual framework to help consolidate the gatekeeping activities of radio online digital brand extensions and solely online digital media brands. The chapter further derived one overarching theme, which summarised the findings of the study in addressing the extent to which the gatekeeping activities performed by radio online digital brand extensions compared with those of solely online digital brands, and how effective these activities were in routing audience traffic to online news websites. It also sought to provide answers to the extent to which the presence of Ghanaian radio online digital brand extension gatekeepers' on Twitter influence their news diffusion within audience personal networks compared with those of Ghanaian online digital news media gatekeepers.

The overarching theme was:

- News media branding: towards a 'glocalised' or 'cosmolocalism' gatekeeping approach.

This theme summarises the approach to news media branding, where there was a global or cosmopolitan understanding of what gatekeeping was, but media organisations adopted a context-driven approach to its implementation. The media organisations had an idea of how to conduct gatekeeping, however, based on the mission and brand expectations of the news outlet, they choose to go about it in a way that suits their objectives and achieves their purpose or in the way they want to be seen by their audiences and society.

Chapter Nine, being the final chapter, summarises the preceding eight chapters, projecting the contribution of this study to the gatekeeping and media branding literature in Ghana. It also provides recommendations to media organisations to consolidate their branding activities on journalistic and editorial orientations which has been effective for media branding, rather than largely management decisions and marketing orientations. Finally, avenues for further research were suggested.

## **1.8 Summary**

This chapter has given a background to the problem under investigation, contextualising it and giving justification for its relevance and essence. It identified what the study sought to achieve in the form of research objectives, with the attendant research questions. The chapter laid bare the type of study adopted, which is exploratory, with justifications for why it was expedient to approach it from an interpretivist paradigm using a qualitatively-driven, mixed-methods approach. Finally, a brief outlay of how the thesis has been structured was presented to provide a smooth flowing and unfolding of information.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **AN IMPORTANT PARADIGM SHIFT: THE EVOLUTION OF GATEKEEPING AND A TRANSFORMATION OF RADIO FROM UNIDIRECTIONAL COMMUNICATION TO ONE INVOLVING AUDIENCE INTERACTION**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the evolution of gatekeeping theory from unidirectional models to networked and digital models. Additionally, the adequacy of these models in analysing the gatekeeping function will be discussed. This will serve as a prelude to gatekeeping theorisation, with detailed elaborations on that in Chapter Five, the theoretical framework. This chapter will also consider the important role played by traditional news media outlets and their online digital brand extensions. It addresses the roles they perform which makes them gatekeepers among competing gatekeepers in the digital era. It further argues that the ability of traditional media outlets to 'guard their gates' and maintain professional standards in the face of stiff competition has earned them credibility and brand personalities that audiences want to associate with. The chapter also discusses the brand power and additional advantages that radio brings to its online digital brand extension, which other solely online news media brands may not be privileged to have. Finally, to help discover what triggers news diffusion on online digital media platforms, this chapter discusses these and focuses on Twitter.

#### **2.2 New media paradigms challenge existing gatekeeping theories and models**

Gatekeeping theory in news media research started with White (1950), when he adapted Lewin's (1943) field theory into media studies. Subsequent to this seminal



study, gatekeeping research has become more complex by expanding to new media and other content producers apart from traditional media gatekeepers. This evolution has been necessitated by a need to account for new developments and challenges within the media, as pre-existing theories were deemed unable to do so. These new developments in gatekeeping theorisation were necessary to address technological developments, changes in news-gathering routines, economic constraints and advancements in technologies (Bennett & Kaid 2004).

White's (1950) simple theory considered the news editor or individual gatekeeper in the traditional media setting as the most important factor with significant authority in deciding what should be news, thus, setting the public agenda. Other studies conducted after White (1950) evaluated the complexity of the gatekeeping process, arguing that White's (1950) theory would not be enough to assess the whole gatekeeping process, and that gatekeeping should be analysed beyond the individual gatekeeper's role (Dimitrova et al. 2003; Hollifield, Kosicki & Becker 2001; Peterson 1981; Plaisance & Skewes 2003; Singer 1997; Snider 1967; Wanta & Craft 2004). They confirmed that gatekeepers were not only individuals, but individuals, organisations and institutions that determined the volume and type of information to be consumed by audiences. Pictorially depicted in the Hierarchy of Influences Model, Shoemaker (1991), and later Shoemaker and Reese (1996, 2014), presented a useful multi-level, hierarchical influencers-assessing model for media gatekeeping. The five levels of media content influencers were identified as: the individual; media routines; organizational; social institutions; and social systems level. This model was useful for many years, especially when the news process was unidirectional, as in traditional media like radio. However, with technology shifting the media focus to digital media

and traditional media converging on digital platforms, this model has been critiqued as lacking the necessary robustness to recognise new digital technologies (Cossiavelou, Bantimaroudis, Kavakli & Illia 2011:51) and failing to tackle the challenges of the digital era.

The digital era presents newer challenges to gatekeeping theory. Particularly as it introduces other gatekeepers who operate separate 'gates' from those of traditional media gatekeepers, thus, creating a multiplicity of gates and sources of information to audiences. Reese, Rutigliano, Hyun & Jeong (2007:238) aptly argue that:

Admittedly, technology has altered the nature of the profession itself, but more broadly journalism has been distributed and interlinked more fluidly with citizen communication. The blogosphere provides an interweaving of these different locations as it pushes users to a network of information, views and perspectives, thus bringing a broader journalistic conversation to life.

With the advent of digital media technologies, gatekeeping theory has been conceptualised as being in a state of transition (Shoemaker & Vos 2009; Vos & Heinderyckx 2015) because new content producers have not been catered for in conventional and contemporary gatekeeping models. Conventional gatekeeping theories are said to require a different conceptualisation in the new media age than those used in the 1950s by White (Welbers & Opgenhaffen 2018:4731), hence, challenging their continued relevance (Heinderyckx & Vos 2016; Pearson & Kosicki 2017). Unreservedly, "digital media arguably challenge[s] old theories" (Cossiavelou, Bantimaroudis, Kavakli & Illia 2011:51), calling for a re-assessment of existing gatekeeping theories in effectively analysing the complexities of the digital and networked new media environments. Digital media have prompted digital and networked gatekeeping theories to address the gaps identified in reference to the

multichannel and diverse content producers and information filters, requiring a gatekeeping function within the existing framework (Robinson 2006; Singer 1998; Williams & Delli Carpini 2004).

The call for new media gatekeeping theories in the digital media era, and the attendant responses, have not been created outside conventional or pre-existing theories. Instead, they are the result of a re-organisation of existing conventional theories to make room for new content producers and information filters. Cossiavelou, Bantimaroudis, Kavakli and Illia (2011:51) have observed that “the digital media’s gatekeeping capabilities are not accounted for in isolation, but in combination with all the other filters described in the Shoemaker/Reese model”. This establishes the Hierarchy of Influences Model (Shoemaker 1991; Shoemaker & Reese 1996; 2014), which is an elaborate and far-reaching model, as an essential basis for new digital gatekeeping theories, which are only reformed versions of existing models. Most importantly, though conventional gatekeeping models may not be wholly operational in the digital media era, they retain some usefulness even in the digital media era. In addition, digital media technologies cannot exist without the foundation laid by traditional gatekeeping theories.

Shoemaker and Vos’ (2009) holistic gatekeeping model which was one of the earliest contemporary gatekeeping models, re-visited Lewin’s (1943) original gatekeeping model to draw in public/citizen/online users into its modeling. It presents a contemporary adaptation of the original gatekeeping concept (Lewin’s 1943), while, at the same time, merging the Hierarchy of Influences Model (Shoemaker 1991;

Shoemaker & Reese 1996, 2014) to portray the multivariate and multi-level factors influencing news content and information. Apart from the model being critiqued as offering “little evidence of the impact of digital technologies on every level of media gatekeeping analysis” (Cossiavelou, et al 2011:51), it also fails to acknowledge the presence of other data aggregators and algorithmic devices in the digital gatekeeping process. Thus, masking the possibility of non-professional gatekeepers in breaking news stories (Wallace 2018:285).

The network gatekeeping theory was taken further by Chin-Fook and Simmonds (2011), who acknowledged the increased opportunity for interactivity in the digital era. They transformed the unidirectional flow of information into a multidirectional flow, taking into account everyday individuals, networked individuals, professional communicators and institutions which have the potential to influence one another in online information flow, mirroring the exact happenings in the digital world. This model, however, places all the gatekeepers on the same platform, not taking cognizance of the fact that various gatekeepers “differ in access, criteria for selecting content and use of the multiple spaces where content may be published” (Wallace 2018:284). Wallace (2018) proposes a detachment of the news selection process of the gatekeeper from the gatekeeping mechanism of the platform for the categories of gatekeepers identified in digital gatekeeping theorisation.

Networked and digital gatekeeping models have been presented as solutions to gaps unaccounted for by conventional and contemporary gatekeeping models due to the changes and complexities of media gatekeeping in the digital era. It has been

observed that the pace of technological advancement has made it difficult for contemporary gatekeeping models to be relevant for extended periods in accounting for newer content producers. Their development into digital gatekeeping theories may be better placed in tackling this issue, especially because they seek to bring in new gatekeepers and analyse their activities by decoupling the information selection process of the gatekeeper from the gatekeeping mechanism of the platform. Wallace (2018), for instance, in her digital modeling of gatekeeping, identified four types of content producers – journalists, algorithms, strategic professionals and individual amateurs. These all access information using different selection and gatekeeping mechanisms. Additionally, their choices of publication platforms may be centralised or decentralised depending on the level of access they possess, and this determines the visibility of the content published. Largely, digital gatekeeping models, such as that of Wallace (2018), addresses many of the challenges of gatekeeping in the digital era by bringing to bear the inequalities of gatekeeping power distributed among various content producers.

This topic is further deliberated upon in the theoretical framework in Chapter Five. The next section details the professional roles of traditional media gatekeepers, that make them gatekeepers, among other identified gatekeepers in the digital media era.

### **2.3 Traditional news media outlets: gatekeepers among gatekeepers**

Technological advancement in the digital era brought in its wake a drastic transformation in the functions of traditional media, especially radio. It has been argued that radio survived and adapted to the introduction of television (Miller 2017;

Oliveira, Stachyra & Starkey 2014), but, once again, its resilience has been put to the test in the face of digital technologies. It has also been contended that gatekeeping, which is a key aspect of traditional media, was necessary because of the scarcity in space, time and geographical location, and that the new digital space has diminished these barriers (Bruns (sa); Ferreira 2018; Singer 2010). This is partially true because, even in the digital era where space and information abound, gatekeeping remains relevant, especially for media outlets to build their brand and for their survival. Non-journalistic actors such as audiences and algorithmic devices are involved in news creation, and selection and publishing, proffering the question who guards the gates or who are the gatekeepers of the digital era (Welbers 2016)? The people considered audiences in the traditional media setting and thought to be passive receivers of news content, are now active participants in the news process. Being an 'audience' in a digital space has been categorised as an "ever-changing fluid concept" (Bird 2003:4), because "The conditions and boundaries of audiencehood are inherently unstable" (Moore 1993:2), thus, switching between audience and gatekeeper with the urge to be informed and to keep others informed. Their active participation in the news process has questioned the traditional gatekeeping roles and functions of news media outlets. However, these changes in the media, which acknowledge the other content producers, "will not result at all in a diluted concept of gatekeeper, but rather its appreciation under new variables, which, although altering it in an essential way, do not detract from its validity and interest" (Ferreira 2018:488).

Conventional gatekeeping theory is said to require a different conceptualisation in the new media age than that used in the 1950s by White (Welbers & Opgenhaffen 2018:4731) challenging its continued relevance (Heinderyckx & Vos 2016; Pearson &

Kosicki 2017). Inasmuch as this might be true with regard to the theory of gatekeeping, the concept and metaphor of gatekeeping, as the preparation or transformation of information into news, which is a key normative function performed by traditional media, remains relevant even in the digital era (Bastos, Raimundo & Travitzki 2013; Heinderyckx & Vox 2016:32; Thurman 2015:12). Gatekeeping theory, as applied by White (1950), emphasized the news editor as the most influential person in news agenda setting. However, as projected later by other scholars, the environment and other factors also influence agenda setting to various degrees (Reese 1991; Shoemaker & Reese 1996; Shoemaker & Vos 2009). The dynamics within the media as a result of the introduction of new trends called for a revision of gatekeeping models to cater for these changes. Thus, while gatekeeping theory has been dynamic and evolved over years, the concept remains static.

The digital era, with its attendant resources and advantages, has made it possible for everybody with access to a network device and internet to create and share content. An open media environment that presents no limits on who publishes and what can be published has not only increased news channels but has also brought in its wake an era of fake news circulation. Here, people fail to confirm news stories before publication because they want to be the first to share them (Endert 2018; Singer 2015). This multiplicity of channels has fostered the argument that traditional news sources have lost their monopoly as major information sources in the digital era and are fading in importance (Heinderyckx & Vox 2016:32). Similar to the prediction of the end of print books with the advent of e-books (Heinderyckx & Vox 2016:31), so traditional media remains steadfast and their gatekeeping roles remain in place (Ali & Fahmy 2013; Thurman 2015:12). The widely shared normative standards, ethical principles,

accountability and values within the professional routines of journalists have accounted for their continued credibility. Journalism, as an occupation, has evolved and survived in spite of technological innovations due to “its credibility, which is gained through the collective behaviour of its practitioners” (Singer 2014:22).

The influx of news distribution channels has not proportionately matched the diversity of people constructing news. It has been observed that, an “Overabundance of choice is not necessarily what people want...Fortunately, one common cognitive shortcut is to depend on trusted brand names” (McDowell 2011:43). The majority of news distributors lack the capacity and capability to collect their own news, suggesting they seek and distribute news from other sources. Traditional news sources often serve as credible and authoritative news sources for such distributors. Arguably, credible news content that reaches the public has not changed much compared to before the digital era (Heinderyckx & Vox 2016:33; Nielsen 2014). This suggests a great deal of influence from traditional news sources, even in the digital space. Some public/citizen/online user gatekeepers and online digital news gatekeepers, conceptualised as “gatewatchers” (Bruns 2003), keep a constant eye on the news outlets of traditional news media for news stories which have been professionally gathered and transformed, for re-publication on their blogs, social media accounts and organisational websites.

Professional journalism news values may not be applicable to non-professional news creation and distribution from bloggers and the public or citizens on social media, and it may be difficult for national and international press councils to regulate or monitor non-professionals. In such situations, criticism from other network users, sometimes



serve to check excesses on news stories published. Concerns range from “standards of spelling, punctuation, accuracy, and balance; as well as the influence of blogs on the mainstream media” (Thurman 2015:6).

The increased participation of audiences in news content creation sometimes translates into a form of reciprocal journalism between audiences and journalists. This is where audiences sometimes feed traditional news sources with news information, and vice versa. Sometimes referred to as citizen journalists (Thurman 2015), such active feeding of news content to the mainstream news media has led to the broadcasting or publishing of breaking news by eyewitnesses. This active participation by audiences contributes to the ever-changing power dynamics between the public and journalists (Groshek & Tandoc 2017). Singer (2014) has argued that media audiences who also exercise some form of gatekeeping in publishing information are “secondary gatekeepers”. Though their contributions sometimes do not conform to normative goals, they contribute to diversity of information, viewpoints and information sources.

Inasmuch as there could be many gatekeepers, including audiences who publish news, traditional news media outlets with a presence on digital platforms can be classified as “key influencers” (Sheldrake 2011) who still set professional news agenda and construct peoples’ social reality. This is because important professional news gathering and gatekeeping processes still lie primarily with traditional news media organisations (Baum & Groeling 2008; Pew Research Centre 2010c). These traditional news organisations might set the agenda of online news by determining what the important issues for debate are in society (McCombs & Shaw 1972; Meraz 2011). Key influencers, according to Sheldrake (2011), have influence on specific brands,

services and purchasing decisions using digital and social platforms and have a large, developed presence on digital platforms. Klinger and Svensson (2015:1251) advance that the “majority of relevant information still comes from journalistic content production, and is distributed via established traditional mass media [and their digital brand extensions] and is used by individuals from routinized [*sic*] media menus.” Many online news outlets depend on traditional news media outlets as their main sources of information. They watch their ‘gates’ (Bruns 2003) for news stories, meaning that much of the news circulating online has already passed journalistic gates (Pew Research Center 2010a; Shoemaker & Vos 2009), making traditional news media outlets gatekeepers among gatekeepers. This corroborates Hindman’s (2009:13) assertion that “Some ways in which online information is filtered are familiar, as traditional news organisations and broadcast companies are prominent on the web.” This resonates with Vos’ (2015:10) warning that: “As empowering as it would be to believe that the circulation of news had been democratized [*sic*] through digital media, we would do well to investigate the variety of channels or patterns for how news makes its way to the public”.

In the digital media era, traditional news media have positioned themselves to live up to competition, and attract traffic and audiences by converging their services with new media to create brand extensions. Most traditional news outlets now have online news services and social media platforms which are extensions of their traditional media news production and services. Traditional news media outlets post links and headlines of their news stories on their social media handles. Since audiences lack the capacity to gather and process their own news, they often focus their attention on digital news outlets owned by traditional news organisations as sources of credible news for

redistribution (Anderson 2011; Edmonds 2014; Olmstead, Mitchell, & Rosenstiel 2011; Nielsen 2014; Webster & Ksiazek 2012), even though other blogs and online digital news outlets exist. Audiences often resend these news information and links to news stories in their personal social media networks. These seek to create interest and, subsequently, route traffic to the news websites of traditional media where full stories to the links are published. This authenticates the roles of traditional news media and their gatekeeping function as pivotal sources of credible news, even in the digital era.

Being sources of credible news, traditional news sources also serve as sources of confirmation for news stories that have gone viral on social media (Bosch 2014; Brandtzæg et al 2015; Bruns 2003; Nielsen 2014). As part of the gatekeeping function, traditional news sources often do not rush to publish news stories. They routinely verify information received before publication, serving as sources of authentic, reliable and credible news stories (Endert 2018; Singer 2015). This propagates a general perception that news from traditional news media outlets are sure to be true and can be trusted.

To engage their audiences, traditional news media online digital brand extensions have integrated social media and other participatory platforms into their routines to allow their audiences to share their opinions on news stories. Even in incorporating participatory ideals, rather than adjusting their practices to social media affordances, journalists have adapted social media to their own routines (Gulyas 2013; Halpern & Gibbs 2013; Lasorsa, Lewis & Holton 2011; Molyneux 2015). And in so doing, policing their profession by defining, shaping, as well as reinforcing the norms, values, standards and practices of traditional journalism. Though the flow of information on

digital platforms is multidirectional, traditional news media outlets try to re-appropriate their control and influence online content by exercising traditional gatekeeping practices (Chin-Fook & Simmonds 2011; Thurman 2015). Singer (2015:21) opines that “normative principles that initially formed the basis of resistance subsequently have helped to guide journalists toward productive use of material originating outside the newsroom”. Even in allowing audience comments and public contribution to news stories, which serve to portray audience loyalty, sources of news stories, as well as depth and diversity of coverage (Thurman 2015:6), some form of gatekeeping is still exercised within existing journalistic norms. Editors and journalists in general exercise some form of moderation or demand audience registration, thus, emphasising journalists’ control of news content and power over their audiences (Bosch 2014; Singer & Ashman 2009).

#### **2.4 Media accountability, regulatory and legal requirements in the digital era**

The operations and activities of media firms are often impacted by the changes within the environmental and social context in which they find themselves and operate. These changes cannot be avoided or controlled, however, the strategies adopted by media organisations in response to these changes determine the impact that the changes have on them. These changes include economic, technological, political, sociological and demographic factors of change, which are driven by globalisation, technological advancements and changing audiences. While economic, technological, sociological and demographic factors directly impacted the survival of media outlets, the political changes impact the accountability, regulatory and legal requirements that media firms are expected to meet.

Liberal and democratic reform on the continent of Africa in the 1990s saw the emergence of competitive, independent and pluralistic media programming in Ghana, with diversity of languages (Blankson 2005:1,2,4). This led to media deregulation, which saw the adoption of liberal ownership rules to encourage cross-media competition and the introduction of new media rules of accountability and regulation. McQuail (2005:207) argues media accountability includes “all the voluntary or involuntary processes by which the media answer directly or indirectly to their society for the quality and/or consequences of their publications”. The media’s quest for freedom, on the one hand, and the government and society’s quest for media responsibility, on the other hand, often breed tension when issues of media accountability are raised (Plaisance 2000). While this tension is seen by pro-accountability mechanisms as a means to make the media responsible and transparent, it can also be seen as an effort to curtail freedom of speech and censor media platforms and outlets (see Cohn 2018). Plaisance (2000:266) argues that this tension often has to be managed rather than solved. Regardless of the freedom enjoyed by the media, because they do not work in a vacuum, they have an obligation to the society within which they work. This obligation, therefore, requires the media to operate in a way that enhances, rather than jeopardises society (Siebert et al 1963:75).

The essence of government regulation within the media fraternity in any country is based on economic, political and socio-cultural factors (Freedman, Henten, Towse & Wallis 2008:102; Picard 2002:91). Thus, standardising media activities for global

media operations and to control the possibility of monopolies. The pre-digital media era provided room for total media regulation, especially because the media operating licence was the direct responsibility of government or agencies assigned with the task. In Ghana, for instance, the National Communications Authority (NCA) is mandated with the issuance of operating licences to radio and television outlets. The National Media Commission (NMC), on the other hand, is bestowed with the constitutional mandate to “take all appropriate measures to ensure the establishment and maintenance of the highest journalistic standards in the mass media” (Ghana 1992). The NMC has been criticised for not living up to the expectations of media stakeholders (Adow 2010; Tettey 2006), and for paying lip service to media accountability standards in Ghana. However, the digital era presents a more challenging experience that deepens the woes of agencies trusted with media accountability in Ghana and the world at large.

The digital era embraces a wide array of content producers at different levels, and the ease of entry of gatekeepers presents an even greater challenge to regulate. However, it has provided the opportunity for previously marginalised people to have a voice. This and other positive accounts notwithstanding, the kind of information that is often circulated on social media and the internet leaves room for other considerations. It has been argued that, though social media sites initially appeared as neutral providers of hosting services, they have been found to be facilitators of the information that is shared on their sites (Lab 8 2019). Article 19<sup>2</sup> has, for instance, proposed the creation of Social Media Councils (SMCs). These are multi-stakeholder accountability

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<sup>2</sup> Article 19 is a British human rights organization with a specific mandate and focus on the defence and promotion of freedom of expression and freedom of information worldwide founded in 1987.

mechanisms in various countries to provide open, transparent, accountable and participatory fora to address content moderation issues on social media platforms on the basis of international standards on human rights (Lab 8 2019).

Accountability and regulation of content on social media presents a global challenge for media organisations and countries. While some media organisations moderate content from social media that appears on their websites and handles, other effective mechanisms include: blocking profiles or the suspension of protocols of people who frequently post fake news; and using algorithms that are able to detect suspicious posts and flagging malicious activities. There is a deliberate need to innovate on online communication protocols to ensure media accountability and regulation on social media that will not infringe on civil rights, especially freedom of speech.

The following section discusses the way normative and ethical principles in the boundary work of traditional news media outlets have helped build brands for easy identification, following in the era of multiple news channels.

## **2.5 Brand power of radio online digital brand extensions**

The reputation of traditional news media as credible news sources, fundamentally because of their gatekeeping functions and boundary work, have earned them significant followers, even in the digital era. Traditional news media professionals have, since their inception and subsequent presence on online digital platforms, provided factual, reliable, timely and meaningful news. This distinguishes them irrespective of the numerous blogs, online digital news outlets, and audience channels. This one activity serves as a distinguishing brand-building feature for them. In the midst of competition, strong brands continue to earn customer loyalty, brand power and referrals or brand advocacy (Ghodeswar 2008:4). With the brand serving as credible guarantees for consumers to identify with products that genuinely offer added value (Murphy 1998).

Traditional news media organisations who have converged their services with new media stand a better chance of combining their expertise in the traditional system with that of the new media. Arguably placing them at an advantage over stand-alone online digital news media organisations. Cruz and Lee (2014:72) confirm that “Brands with a strong image, rich history and fierce competition are likely to develop a community”, no matter the perceived competition.

Research suggests that the activities of traditional media gatekeepers on social media seems to be more conventional than dialogic and more passive than reciprocal. Particularly compared to the activities of blogs and online news media gatekeepers (Groshek & Tandoc 2017:209). This has been occasioned by the boundary position engaged in by traditional media which restrains them from deviating from traditional



journalistic norms and practices, even in an environment of lesser restrictions like social media. This notwithstanding, traditional news media organisations and their professional gatekeepers, in most contexts, enjoy greater following on Twitter and other social media platforms than blogs and online digital news media gatekeepers (Groshek & Tandoc 2017:209). In comparing the influence of traditional media gatekeepers with those of online digital news media gatekeepers who challenge traditional media's boundary work in the digital news media environment, Groshek and Tandoc (2017) suggest from their research that, though they were the least active, traditional media gatekeepers still control the gatekeeping process online and on social media, especially on Twitter. This is because they tend to have more followers for news updates than online digital news media gatekeepers. Additionally, according to Lasorsa, Lewis and Holton (2011), traditional media gatekeepers prefer to engage in content promotion rather than expressing personal opinions in their tweets. Which is characteristic of professional standards in traditional journalistic practices, hence, the many followers.

In relating to their audiences, Heinonen (2011) suggested three categories of roles performed by news media organisations, based on the approach adopted. These are: the conventional, dialogical and ambivalent roles. According to him, the conventional role manifests in a "need to safeguard the journalist's professional status and the media brand" (Heinonen 2011:51). This role is characteristic of traditional media gatekeepers, who, in spite of the presence of competing gatekeepers of their professional values and standards, protect their editorial autonomy and professional credibility. In view of this, Groshek and Tandoc (2017:209) have encouraged traditional media outlets and gatekeepers to take advantage of the technological

benefits that reorient the production and consumption of news in the digital era, and to engage with their audiences.

The dialogical role is functional when ordinary public/citizens/online users are considered as “genuine co-workers” (Heinonen 2011:49), who work alongside journalists by providing newsworthy information. In this regard, media gatekeepers are open to the contributions and feedback from public/citizens/online users and these form a core component of news items. This role is typical of online news media gatekeepers, who often lack the capacity to gather news and, thus, capitalise on such sources to expand and diversify their news stories. They, therefore, open their doors wide to diverse views and inputs, and provide opportunity for people who, otherwise, would have been marginalised (Groshek & Tandoc 2017).

The third, and final, role is the ambivalent role which is a hybrid of the conventional and dialogical roles. It merges features of both roles in news gathering and processing (Heinonen 2011). This is typical of most present-day traditional media gatekeepers and online news media gatekeepers. Traditional news media outlets who adopt this approach in engaging with their audiences often make it a point to verify the facts before publication (Endert 2018; Singer 2015), thereby, maintaining rigid routine news values and boundary work. Singer (2015:28) reports on the *Associated Press (AP)* guidelines on including public opinion on a topic. She notes that:

the multi-faceted verification process includes, among other steps, checking the source’s social history, comparing the content with AP reporting, running material past regional experts, and verifying the context.

She further notes that according to the *AP* social media and User-generated Content Editor, Fergus Bell, “Even if something is incredibly compelling and it doesn’t pass one

of our steps, then it doesn't go out". This is how they ensure the accuracy of every news story they publish. Singer (2015) subsequently affirms that the *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)* has a similar verification system manned by 20 journalists. Groshek and Tandoc (2017:204) attest that most journalists tend to be uncertain of the activities of these public/citizen/online users. However, since professional gatekeepers cannot be everywhere to cover news stories, especially breaking news stories, such sources could be of immense benefit; provided the source and information are verified before publication.

The traditional role of radio in making high quality content available to audiences is not enough to sustain the medium in terms of relevance in today's competitive media market. This also means "taking care of the audience through social media" (Sellas & Bonini 2014:77). For a medium such as radio, which was born to broadcast content to its audiences in a one-way communication process, managing its new personality in the digital and networked social media environment to 'listen' and interact with audiences could be difficult (Sellas & Bonini 2014:79). However, this requires additional responsibility to remain competitive, relevant and sustainable. Results from some ethnographic studies in various countries and cultural backgrounds signpost that radio stations often lack a specific strategy of maintaining their online digital brand extensions and so they tend to experiment with various strategies (Pilitsidou, Tsigilis & Kalliris 2019; Sellas & Bonini 2014). However, Sellas and Bonini (2014:79) are of the view that for radio stations with online digital brand extensions, "mastering their brand values means engaging with listeners". A major study by Lind and Medoff (1999) on radio stations' uses of news websites as additions to their traditional news outlets confirmed that the primary reason for this add-on was to connect and interact

with the stations' audiences. Other findings of the study suggested that radio stations' mission with their online presence was to appear technologically savvy; to stay competitive as others with website presence; and, above all, to enhance "brand image and loyalty" (Lind & Medoff 1999:217). These findings were corroborated by Greer and Phipps (2003), who studied non-commercial religious radio stations that had online digital presence in the form of news website and social media platforms. In another study, Lin and Jeffres (2001) studied newspapers, radio stations and television stations which had online digital presence. Their study also suggested that radio stations provided promotional content, community service information, as well as links to government sites and other technical features on their news websites, all targeted at "building brand identity by promoting their stations" (Lin & Jeffres 2001:568).

In a bid to have "work intimacy" (Gregg 2011) with their audiences through their websites and social media, radio online digital brand extensions acknowledge the added responsibility to their traditional product-line. To bridge the gap, radio online digital brand extensions employ social media curators and social media managers whose primary responsibility is to "master radio brands" and to "produce the particular relationship with consumers that the brand embodies" (Sellas & Bonini 2014:78). An advantage of radio online digital brand extensions over the solely online digital media brands is that social media curators are often professional gatekeepers who have experience with traditional media standards due to the fact that "they began working in radio not as experts of new media, but as radio producers or journalists" (Sellas & Bonini 2014:76). Bringing their professional expertise to this new environment serves to provide their brands an edge over others. A single-newsroom ethnographic study of the *New York Times* by Usher (2014) validates the advantage of traditional media's

experience, even on the digital platform. Usher (2014:228) acknowledges that, though the once powerful traditional media institution has had to adapt its services to the inescapable digital media world, “many of the routines and practices of news production observed in the golden era of news ethnography remain constant.” This edge places traditional media gatekeepers in a position of excellence in their new environment. The “influence professionals” (Sheldrake 2011) role of social media curators and social media managers leaves them with organisational, analytical, communications and strategic responsibilities to situate their online digital brand extensions for influence and success. This signifies the important positions they hold as far as the success of their online digital brands are concerned.

The presence of news curators on online digital brands is to explore means of employing their professional experiences to carve social media news content which, though suited to target younger audiences, will also remain faithful to normative editorial and journalistic standards. A study of seven radio stations in Italy and Spain by Sellas and Bonini (2014) affirmed that social media curators were often older than social media managers. This is because social media managers were the faces of their organisations in managing audiences who were often within their age bracket and had similar ideological socialisation.

## **2.6 Radio in hybridisation – new paradigm, added responsibilities**

With the advent of new media technologies, radio finds itself in a state of hybridisation, having converged its traditional conventions with new media through adaptation. Radio transformed from its originally known self into hybrid phenomena where it now combines both online and offline tools and channels to diffuse news stories. Known by names such as hybrid media system (Chadwick 2013), multiple platform formats or enterprises (Enli 2007; Ju, Jeong & Chyi 2014) and media convergence (Klinger & Svensson 2015); this system makes it possible to meet the news needs of the different media audience segments with information. Radio stations now have news websites and social media platforms where they publish news links, news highlights and full-length news stories with the intention of diffusing it among their audiences, especially netizens, who access all their news needs online.

While online news diffusion is not replacing traditional media news diffusion now, especially in Africa, and Ghana in particular, where illiteracy is still an issue to contend with, and the pace of technological advancement is slow, Klinger and Svensson (2015:1251) are of the view that the core argument has been that social media platforms present additional “rules of the game” compared with traditional mass media. Traditional media gatekeepers and online news media gatekeepers have similar ways of gathering information, but the roles of disseminating their news differ. A study by Rao (2007:13) on gatekeeping roles, especially the news selection practices of two online newspaper editors, found out that online newspaper editors had similar function as their print counterparts. However, the uniqueness of online digital platforms dictate extra responsibilities to online news media gatekeepers. For instance, the limitless

space, interactivity and real-time information publication makes it imperative for online digital news gatekeepers to select news stories that will “elicit feedback and are updated regularly” (Rao 2007:13). Thus, they encourage their audiences to read their stories and provide comments on their news stories. The limitless space online also provides opportunity to publish full length and detailed stories. The online editor of *DallasMorningNews.com*, who happened to be part of the study, corroborates that online news stories are longer than the same stories captured in traditional media, especially print (Rao 2007:12). The study noted that the print version of the newspaper mostly publishes abridged stories in their print newspaper, with extended versions on their online newspaper website. Additionally, the online editor indicated that they put a comment at the end of news stories in their print newspapers to their audiences for them to read more on the story online. This served as an opportunity to route traffic onto their online digital news platforms.

Further to this, online digital news gatekeepers have additional responsibilities to perform compared to their traditional media counterparts. An urgent responsibility is to find out what the interests of audiences are, especially as “online readers have different interests than print readers and look for stories that affect them while they are reading” (Rao 2007:12). Stories published have to be interesting enough to compel audiences to engage and interact with what is happening on social media. Real time commenting and chatting about on-air happenings on television and radio via social media is a common feature that has intensified the bond between new and old media (Selas & Bonini 2014:71). Sellas and Bonini (2014:71) affirm that the frequent use of Twitter as an extension of the television experience by viewers in the United States of America and the United Kingdom, has earned it the nickname “second screen”. This

is largely because it has become the alternative for interacting with traditional media gatekeepers on what they watch on television.

Online digital news diffusion blurs the boundary between 'work and life' because it departs from the era of doing all news-related activities in the confines of the studio. New media news diffusion requires constant scheduling of updates and using software tools for automated publishing. Sellas and Bonini (2014:77) draw the distinction as such:

Working as a producer for a radio programme before the era of social media meant going to the radio station, producing the recorded or live programme, then going home, like a worker finishing a shift at a factory. Working as a producer in the era of social media means working constantly, even from home, confusing the boundaries between work and life. The radio programme has a limited duration, a beginning and an end, but the relationship that this content establishes with its public is one that lasts over time. Social media allow the radio programme to continue living, before and after it goes on-air.

Generally, traditional news media may be seen to be in stiff competition with other online digital news platforms. However, the hybrid system reduces this competition since they can be perceived to be in a different category. Traditional news processes by mass media cannot be absolutely differentiated from that of the networked digital platforms in the hybrid system since they overlap in some regard. While some of the activities undertaken on the two platforms are independent of each other, others are interdependent and influence each other. Gatekeeping is one of the functions that is performed on both traditional and online digital platforms. Chadwick (2013:207) stresses that "the hybrid system is based upon conflict and competition between older and newer media logics but it also features important pockets of interdependence among these logics". This makes experiences from traditional media highly valuable



in the digital era. Sellas and Bonini's (2014:76) study confirms that most social media curators "began working in radio not as experts of new media, but as radio producers or journalists". However, adapting to the new opportunity and environment provided by new media had also not been difficult because of the experience from their traditional media background.

On the other hand, the driving forces of news on traditional media and online digital platforms are different and warrant different approaches. While "traditional media companies are mainly driven by two competing logics – audience-oriented commercial logic and normatively oriented public logic" (Landerer 2013:245), online digital news media platforms are driven by interconnectedness. Social media news diffusion emphasises connectivity of individuals and groups, so that the more connections one has, the wider their news and information diffusion network. Though the idea of interconnectedness is a new exposure to traditional media, their ability to employ experts in the area has helped to live up to the opportunities it brings. They 'know' their customers and are able to build a strong bond with them, thus, increasing the loyalty between the media brands and their audiences. Once media audiences share links from traditional news media online digital brand extensions within their personal networks, new connections are created in favour of the online digital brands of the traditional media. The new news recipients could also be a source of further distribution of news items within their personal networks. Thus, paving a way for extensive news distribution within a wider sphere of network which the media outlet itself may not know of.

## **2.7 News diffusion in the digital media environment**

News diffusion has been defined as “a branch of mass communications research dealing with how news is circulated among publics” (Cohen 2017), whether through mass communication channels or interpersonal social networks. Two phases of research have been distinguished in news diffusion research. The first, being the period after World War II until the 1980s, which was primarily controlled by traditional media gatekeepers. During this era, news diffusion among the media was very simple, time consuming and demanded extra effort on the part of the traditional media gatekeepers to reach the desired number of audiences. Newspapers depended on circulation, where the printed versions had to be within the reach of audiences. Television depended on the luxury of having a television set, but radio was quite accessible and far-reaching within a short period because it was cheaper.

The second phase was heralded by the internet and social media epoch from the 1990s, where traditional media gatekeepers, online news media gatekeepers, and public/citizen/online user gatekeepers are participants in the news production and diffusion process. This era seemingly blurs the gap between content creation and publication, and has seen the intense use of the internet and technology for the wide distribution of vast information over large geographical regions within a short period. Chafee and Metzger (2001:369) attest that, “Contemporary media allow for a greater quantity of information transmission and retrieval, place[s] more control over both content creation and selection in the hands of their users and do so with less cost to the average consumer”. With mobile phone technologies, media audiences compete

with mainstream news media as news creators and distributors, even though they largely lack the capacity to gather their own news, except when they have the opportunity to cover breaking news stories in pictures and videos for distribution. When this happens, as in gathering breaking news stories, they sometimes feed mainstream media with such news stories.

In the digital media environment, news diffusion by news media outlets is not as difficult as it used to be before the internet era, where all news had to be read or listened to from the news outlet. Traditional ways of news diffusion were costly, time consuming and the processes did not guarantee a wide diffusion of news stories. The story changed with traditional news media outlets establishing strong presence online and converging their outlets with new media. Even on the online digital news media websites, news diffusion is limited (Baym & Shah 2011). This is because one has to access the website to get news and the “techniques lack an integrated functionality for redistribution to a potentially large and undefined audience” (Trilling, Tolochko & Burscher 2017:40). However, with social media platforms like Twitter, depending on the privacy settings and characteristics of social network sites, news shared on social media is capable of reaching a virtually unlimited and undefined audience within the shortest possible time. When a radio online digital brand extension, for instance, has about five million followers on Twitter, by sharing a link to a news item, all five million followers have the potential to receive the information simultaneously. Thus, reducing the stress of news diffusion. It has been suggested that once a tweet on Twitter is retweeted once, the information disseminates at an amazingly fast pace, reaching saturation or the maximum expected and target audiences within a day (Castillo, El-

Haddad, Pfeffer & Stempeck 2014; Kwak, Lee, Park & Moon 2010; Lerman, Ghosh & Rey 2010).

While some scholars argue that reasons for effective news diffusion on online digital platforms cannot be predictable (Salganik, Dodds & Watts 2006), some empirical studies have successfully identified effective triggerers of news diffusion on online digital platforms. One tried and empirically tested dynamic, with exponential success, is the diffusion of news stories via social media, instead of making audiences visit and read stories on media websites. Trilling, Tolochko and Burscher (2017) provide two complementary approaches to news sharing and diffusion on social media. The first approach, which is based on experiments, emphasises user parameters such as individual traits, attitudes, and habits as causing speed and range of information diffusion on social media. Such studies consider features like opinion leadership of the user and perceived informational utility (Bobkowski 2015), uses and gratifications perspective (Ma, Lee & Goh 2011; 2014) and partisanship concept (Weeks & Holbert 2013). When approached this way, the reported sharing intentions often do not translate into real-world behaviour (Trilling, Tolochko & Burscher 2017:40). However, users with a high number of message exchanges potentially exert strong and selective influence on the information passed within the network (Jürgens, Jungherr & Schoen 2011).

The second approach focuses on message characteristics and is often advanced by content-analytical methods for speed and range diffusion of news (Cheng et al. 2014; Yang & Counts 2010; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan 2012). This line of argument advances

that message characteristics can guarantee speed and range (Cheng et al. 2014; Yang & Counts 2010; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan 2012), and that audiences' characteristics form a major aspect of consideration in the kind of news content shared. Research suggests that messages with characteristics such as negativity, controversiality or credibility are diffused largely and widely (Cappella, Kim, Albarracin 2015; Chen & Berger 2013). A study by Trilling, Tolochko and Burscher (2017) concluded that newsworthiness imparts the diffusion or 'shareworthiness' of news on social media. When a message is deemed as informational or relevant, people do not hesitate to forward or share it within their networks. Among other things, the study concluded that newsworthiness, which could be described as "news selection at the production stage, ... can form a fruitful starting point to develop a concept of shareworthiness" (Trilling et al 2016:53).

Another study by Berger and Milkman (2012) put forward that, though there could be other factors, emotional language and positive news have a great potential for increasing news diffusion. Finally, using a political lens, a study by Boczkowski and Mitchelstein (2012) suggested that news stories which are potentially controversial are mostly shared during election times. It has, however, been argued that though this approach lacks experimental rigour, it collects "unobtrusively real-world data in a non-artificial setting" (Trilling, Tolochko & Burscher 2017:40). The gatekeeping on online digital and social media, thus, goes beyond mere selection, creation and sharing of news stories. But it extends to those that will whip up interest as well as the desire to interact through commenting and sharing.

Traditional media gatekeepers' understanding of their audiences influences their choice of news stories for publication on their web pages and subsequently their social media pages. Thus, propelling interests in the sharing of such stories through links and news headlines. Online digital brand extensions of traditional media stand a chance to increase the diffusion of their news stories widely based on the credibility of their news stories and the brands they have built for themselves in this era when it has become increasingly difficult for the public to discern facts from fiction. Traditional news media outlets with standing records of publishing credible and reliable news in the past and with an established online digital presence on websites and social media, serve as credible sources for wide news diffusion. Bruns' (2003; 2005) concept of gatewatching as an alternative to gatekeeping, affirms the influential position of traditional media on online digital platforms as some public/citizen/online user gatekeepers read their news stories online, and then share links and the information with the networks of their "personal publics" (Schmidt 2014). Furthermore, many online news media outlets without traditional media affiliation do not gather news themselves (Baum & Groeling 2008). Instead, they republish the news of traditional news media outlets, either because they cannot afford it, or their formats, like content aggregators, do not require them to so do (Welbers 2016).

Communication on social media requires different language framing from that of the original news outlet or even the website (Belenkaya 2011; Gleason 2010; Ju, Jeong & Chyi 2014). Online news editors cannot effectively use similar language in their traditional medium for news websites and social media digital platforms. This is because online news users are generally younger than the general adult population who access traditional media. Pew (2010) projects about two-thirds of online news

users (68%) to be under the age of 50, of which about 29% are under 30 years old. These statistics translate into the fact that appropriate language should be used on online digital platforms to attract the right and targeted audiences. This new and medium-specific language is intended to appeal to social media users who will then visit the news website to read the full-length story. For this new and important assignment, which traditional media's professional gatekeepers may not be conversant with, social media editors are hired to "spin existing stories with appropriate text, links and images on their publication's social media accounts" (Ju, Jeong & Chyi 2014:4).

## **2.8 News diffusion on Twitter**

Twitter is a micro-blogging service which was launched in 2006. It was originally developed for mobile phones and allowed users to post short text updates of up to 140 characters called 'tweets' as well as pictures, links and videos to other people's networks. From November 2017, however, the number of characters per tweet was doubled to 280. Because of the limitation in text characters, Twitter is very focused on reading and posting tweets, and has been found to drive more traffic to news sites than other social media platforms (Ju et al 2014:12; Sonderman 2011). Users can post tweets directly on the Twitter website or send text messages directly from their mobile phones. Twitter enables real-time promulgation of information to any number of users anytime and anywhere. This makes the platform a convenient environment for the dissemination of breaking news directly from the news source and/or from the geographical point of interest (Bastos, Raimundo & Travitzki 2013; Hughes & Palen 2009; De Longueville, Smith & Luraschi 2009; France 2009).

On Twitter, connections and networks are built with other users through “following”, which can be done without seeking approval from the one to be followed, provided the account is not private (Ju, Jeong & Chyi 2014:3). Success on Twitter is defined as “having a high number of followers per post” (Hong 2012:70). A motivation for researchers to access and analyse social network data from Twitter is that information is publicly available, and the network structure of Twitter is reasonably simple compared with other social media networks (Bastos, Raimundo & Travitzki 2013; Marwick & Boyd 2011; Suh, Hong, Pirolli & Chi 2010). It is possible to access Twitter without registering, however, to be able to tweet requires registering. The fewer restrictions in accessing Twitter compared to other social media platforms makes it one of the simplest and easily accessible social media networks. Thus, its success (Graham 2008) as the most news-oriented or “newsful” social media platform (Chyi & Chadha 2011:437).

It is now commonplace to see traditional media like newspapers, radio and television prominently represented on the Twitter network sharing hyperlinks to stories hosted on their news websites with the motive of increasing traffic onto their news websites via their social media presence (Ju, Jeong & Chyi 2014:4) and aiding news diffusion. Research suggests that tweets from traditional media organisation account for only 15% of tweets received by ordinary users (Kwak, Lee, Park & Moon 2010; Bastos, Raimundo & Travitzki 2013), while the remaining 85% of tweets are sent by individual users who have become atomised and fragmented in hubs without news media intermediaries. Twitter enables an ‘asymmetric model’ following, whereby news media



organisations can follow a few chosen accounts while millions of audiences, public and online users, can follow the news organisation concurrently (Porter 2009). Twitter users with large number of followers are identified as network hubs (Bastos, Raimundo & Travitzki 2013), whose active presence is said to influence wide and diverse information flow.

News diffusion on Twitter reflects the principle of network topology, depending heavily on retweets (Bastos, Raimundo & Travitzki 2013), showing a linear relationship between the number of followers and retweets. Retweet means resending information posted by someone the user follows, reflecting the information propagation within social networks. Suh, Hong, Pirolli and Chi (2010), for instance, have shown a close correlation between the number of followers a retweeter has and the retweet rate. They conclude that the more followers one has, the more likely it is to have their tweets retweeted. Nonetheless, this finding has been contradicted by Bastos, Raimundo and Travitzki (2013). They contend that user-activity and mention-network are the prevailing forces in wide message and news diffusion on Twitter. Arguing that when a Twitter user has many followers, but does not engage in tweeting or retweeting, no messages will be communicated or diffused. On the other hand, a user with few followers who is active in tweeting can aid news diffusion through their small, primary network, and that of the secondary and extended networks formed by those within the small primary network.

Unlike other social media platforms used by news media outlets, Twitter is the most effective in terms of audience reach (Ju, Jeong & Chyi 2014:1), thereby making it the

preferred social media platform for news organisations. On Twitter, traditional news media outlets have millions of followers, ahead of public/citizens and solely online digital news media, indicating that even on Twitter, traditional media has popular appeal. Artwick (2013:14) admits that Twitter is often perceived as a “dissemination platform for legacy media.” The engaging platform that Twitter presents, creates an opportunity for audiences to easily connect with traditional media outlets by selecting, viewing and interacting with the news content promoted by tweeting, retweeting or tagging. Attaching oneself to a major news channel by following them and retweeting their tweets or sending links often portrays a personality link between the news media outlet and the Twitter user. It is interesting to note that in a bid to “portray both an authentic self and an interesting personality” (Marwick & Boyd 2011:122), users who tweet and tag professional news outlets most probably hope to affiliate with the brand personality of the news outlets.

## **2.9 Summary**

This chapter has discussed the evolution of gatekeeping theory, attributing the need for an evolution to new media paradigms that challenged existing gatekeeping theories, making old models inadequate to analyse new gatekeeping functions and roles. It has been noted that gatekeeping theory evolution has been necessitated by a need to rope in new content producers that the internet, technological advancement and new media advantages presented.

The chapter has also discussed the important role played by traditional news media outlets and their online digital brand extensions in the digital era. It was noted that,

their role, which is quite central to credible news propagation, projects their normative responsibilities in society which cannot be role-played by audiences no matter how much they strive. It was further noted that, by maintaining professional standards in the face of stiff competition from online news media gatekeepers and public/citizen/online users as news sources, traditional media outlets have earned themselves brand identities that audiences always want to associate with. The brand power and advantages that traditional media gatekeepers command and convey onto the new media environment were also discussed as additions to the online digital brand extension which was not found with solely online news media without traditional media affiliation or public/citizen/online user gatekeepers.

To help in discovering what triggers news diffusion online and on social media platforms, this chapter discussed news diffusion from the angles of sender traits, attitudes and habits, as well as message characteristics. The unique interface and characteristics of the Twitter platform which make it a top choice social media for news diffusion were discussed. It was noted that because it allows a limited 280-character news creation, it is effective in routing traffic to the news website of news media outlets. It, therefore, lends itself as a comparably 'newsful' platform than other social media platforms.

## CHAPTER THREE

### MEDIA BRANDING

#### 3.1 Introduction

Brand management, a strategic marketing process initially applied on the marketing of consumer products, has recently been embraced by the media fraternity as an important marketing consideration. This has been necessitated by intense audience-attention competition, competing products, converged technologies and audience fragmentation brought about by globalisation, digitisation of media, and interactive technologies in the multichannel and digital era (Chan-Olmsted 2011; Chan-Olmsted & Cha 2008; McDowell & Batten 2005; Oyediji 2007:116; Siegert, Gerth & Rademacher 2011:65). Media organisations now seek options that guarantee a lasting competitive edge more than the immediate and short-term sales (McDowell 2006a). Though an evolving academic research area, media branding has been identified as a dynamic antidote to the need for media outlets to be ear and eye-catching to stay relevant and survive (Chan-Olmsted 2011; Malmelin & Moisander 2014; Ots 2008). While providing the needed orientation for media audiences to make choices (Siegert, Gerth & Rademacher 2011:65), branding affords the media firm with a viable strategy to “focus on points of differentiation that offer sustainable competitive advantage” (Ghodeswar 2008:4) over the products of competitors. Driven by technological changes, globalisation and the changing audience (Chan-Olmsted 2011; Chan-Olmsted & Cha 2008; Chan-Olmsted 2006), point differentiation calls for a re-examination of media strategy in the context of the contemporary media landscape (Chan-Olmsted, 2006:5). This includes the political, social, regulative, competitive and technological environment (Siegert, Gerth & Rademacher 2011), because previous

brand building efforts of media brand managers cannot be applied to the current settings.

The multi-channel media environment and audience fragmentation created by the digital space and the internet reduces the chances of media outlets being noticed by audiences. Further, it has been argued that functional attributes alone, such as news contents, may not be enough to attract media audiences (Aris & Bughin 2005; Kim, Baek & Martin 2010:117), calling for a different approach. Subsequently, media branding, with its attendant corollary effects and 'soft' concepts, such as brand personality through differentiation, brand attributes and reputation (Aaker 1990; Aris & Bughin 2005; Biel 2003:4), coupled with audience involvement, have been identified as likely and effective tools that guarantee the much desired media audience equity.

Media branding presents critical decision-making on the part of media managers regarding the marketing/business and editorial orientations to follow. While these have been found to be in contention, the ability to draw a balance between them dictates the media identity projected to media audiences (Siegert, Gerth & Rademacher 2011). While this study focuses on the editorial arm of branding, the business side cannot be ruled out because they can hardly be separated. This chapter considers discussions related to media branding and brand personality dimension building. It deliberates on how online digital brand extensions in the form of websites and social media platforms have helped traditional media to rope their audiences into their activities. This allows them to stand up to the challenge from netizens and solely online digital brand extensions without traditional media affiliation. Importantly, the chapter opens

discussions on how normative news media gatekeeping can be considered a brand differentiation feature, especially for traditional media. This is because it helps to produce credible and quality news stories, which they have been perceived over the years to produce to meet the expectation of audiences, even on their associated online digital platforms.

### **3.2 Branding**

Branding, according to Parker (2014:60), is “cultivating a strong, favorable image that differentiates a brand in consumer memory, and generates goodwill towards the company (brand owner), product/service offerings, and future marketing actions”. Branding remarkably impacts the way people view a product by arousing the cognitive, emotional, conscious or unconscious association built with it (Förster 2015:281). Compared to the field of marketing, branding is relatively new to the media industry. This is because the media market operated like a “market for lemons” (Akerlof 1970), where sellers knew about the value of their products, but they failed to make that information available to their buyers through advertising. In effect, customers do not appreciate the benefits of the products. Traditional media journalists assumed that the quality of their news stories would make them stand out and be sought after, until the digital media age provided the ‘litmus test’ of audience ownership and retention. Journalists recently thought about applying branding and advertising to themselves as they sold to others. They have always worked on the premise that high quality journalism breeds success and that news could not be considered a product (Russ-Mohl & Nazhdiminova 2015:339).

Media brands are experiential or experience goods (Chang & Chan-Olmsted 2010:641; Siegert 2015:356), since the quality cannot be estimated until they are experienced or used. As a result, audiences often base their media brand association building on the personae, genre, channel or format provided by the brand. This informs how audiences will perceive the media outlet. Such experience commodities are purchased or consumed based on how they make one “sense, feel, think, act and relate” (Arvidsson 2006:35), and these make up the essence of their use-value. Among parallel products and existing networks of interaction and communication, branding makes it possible to add product features and dimensions of use-value to the brand, to make it stand out from the rest.

In Ghana, some online digital brand extensions of traditional media add product features and dimensions such as an opportunity to experience the programmes on their traditional radio by just clicking the radio add-on button provided on the digital outlet. On some platforms, traditional media outlets advertise flagship programmes of the traditional media, and others provide the programme line-up of their traditional media. In some instances, the front pages of traditional daily newspapers are captured and provided on the radio online digital brand extensions. This allows audiences to be informed about the news in the dailies even before accessing them physically. Such all-in-one product features tend to attract media audiences to radio online digital platforms because they serve as holistic sources of information, especially compared to solely online digital media outlets without traditional media affiliation.

In a meta-theoretical and systematic literature review and analysis of various studies on media brand management, Malmelin and Moisander (2014) observed that media branding, whether explicitly or implicitly, drew on marketing and marketing communication models to conceptualise media brands in five perspectives. Here, the brand could be perceived as a product, an extension, an identity, a differentiation and an equity. A brand as a product is when a brand is viewed as a concrete entity in the form of a branded media product or service (Chan-Olmsted & Cha 2008:41). When viewed as an extension, similar to the application of radio online digital brands in this study, a brand could be viewed as a new product, channel or service launched by an established media brand name in line with a promising opportunity to satisfy a market segment. The success of brand extensions is largely dependent on the good-will and brand equity capitalised by the existing parent brand name and image (Aaker 1990; Chan-Olmsted 2006:63; Chang, Bae & Lee 2004; Doyle 2006). A brand, as an identity, largely reveals the distinctive personality features and characteristics that are outwardly expressed by the media outlet. This includes brand names, slogans, brand logos, choice of language and presentation style of anchors, which are defined by the brand attributes, brand promise and editorial decisions made on journalistic content. Siegert, Gerth & Rademacher (2011:6) sum up brand identity as “a tool for developing, improving, and differentiating the branded offerings of the media company – something that helps the company distinguish its offerings from competitors’ offerings.” According to Kapferer (1992), brand identities are formulated on the basis of three qualities – durability, coherence and realism. The elements to be considered in brand building and identification features should be those that could be used over a long time, they should be consistent with each other, and should also communicate what the brand stands for. Further, brand identity elements are chosen based on five



criteria: memorability, meaningfulness, transferability (both culturally and geographically), adaptability and protectability (both legally and competitively) (Keller 1998).

Similar to brand as identity, brand as differentiation considers strategic practices undertaken by media outlets to elicit positive consumer attitudes towards their brand, increase consumption and strengthen loyalty by creating positive competitive edge. All of which are aimed at success and survival (Chan-Olmsted & Cha 2008:35; Ha & Chan-Olmstead 2001; Malmelin & Moisander 2014; Oyedeji 2007). In Finland, for instance, empirical studies conducted on magazine publishers found that investment in online brand extensions in the form of websites provided new avenues for strengthening customer relationships, increasing brand attachment and loyalty (Aikakauslehtien liitto 2005; Ellonen 2007; Tarkiainen et al 2008). Brand as differentiation has been identified as a promising distinguishing strategy for media organisations (Chan-Olmsted, 2006; 2011; Chan-Olmsted, Cho & Yim 2013; Förestér 2011a; 2011b), which include the generic strategies of cost leadership and product differentiation (Porter 1980). Finally, brand as equity is when a brand is viewed as a financial and symbolic asset worthy of achieving sustainable competitive advantage over similar products. From the consumer or audience perspective, consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) is a measure of the strength, uniqueness and favourability of audience perceptions of a brand (Keller 2002; Oyedeji 2010). The value that media audiences bring to a media brand, according to Keller (2003), is dictated by brand awareness and the way they perceive the brand image, all of which are a product of the media outlets' marketing mix strategy (McDowell 2006b).

Branding comes with both explicit and implicit advantages to a brand and its audiences. These are realised by varying abilities depending on the variables of resources, marketing skills, marketplace circumstances and the context within which the media organisation finds itself (Keller 2009). The expected branding outcome often determines the brand management strategies adopted and the variable-mix chosen. Confirming this assertion, a study by Sheena (2012) into the importance of brand personality concluded that, brands are the direct result of the strategy of market segmentation and product differentiation and that varying customer-demands are evident in all brands. Effective brand management strategies are essential for successful branding practices to translate into customer-based brand equity (CBBE) which is “consumer attitudes to brand and to the value they bring to the company that owns the brand” (Malmelin & Moisander 2014:6). Media outlets with high CBBE enjoy a host of market advantages, including relatively greater audience perception of media credibility and news quality; higher levels of brand loyalty; and price elasticity, compared to competitors with lower CBBE (Keller 2002; Oyediji 2007; Oyediji 2010). Research suggests that the demographic and psychographic characteristics of audiences influence their credibility perception of the media in general and of specific media outlets (Lee 2004; Peng 2005). Additionally, audience perception of news media outlets impact their perception of the credibility of the news messages from that outlet (Meyer 2004; Oyediji 2007; Oyediji 2010). Other benefits of branding include improved perception of product performance; greater customer loyalty; less vulnerability to competitive marketing actions and marketing crisis; increasing marketing communication effectiveness; and additional licensing and brand extension opportunities (Hoeffler & Keller 2003; Keller 2009).

### **3.3 News media branding and brand extensions in the digital media environment**

The once coveted position as news media agenda setters held by traditional media has been challenged by media audiences and other online digital news media in the digital era, increasing the number of news sources. This has challenged the monopoly held by journalists as news sources before the digital era (Shoemaker & Vos 2009). As the number of channels increases and audiences have options, the possibility of being recognised or even chosen by media audiences decreases. Additionally, it becomes difficult to attract media audiences solely on the basis of functional attributes such as news contents (Aris & Bughin 2005; Kim, Baek & Martin 2010:117). Traditional media outlets have seriously felt the pinch. It has been observed that the number of audiences who use traditional media as their mainstream media sources has significantly dropped over the past decade (Ahmad (sa):72; Chan-Olmsted & Cha 2008:33). A report by the Reuters Institute Digital News (2016) found that, although television news continues to remain a reliable source of news to the older generation, its overall consumption continues to decline. Another study by Miller (2017:10) found out that radio use by audiences under 18 years between 2005 and 2016 dropped by fifty percent (50%). He also attests that “The power of music discovery used to lie in the hands of the radio DJ, now it lies in the hands of the playlist curator” (Mulligan, cited in Miller 2017:10). Traditional media, thus, have a responsibility to stay afloat by securing a share of audiences in spite of the multi-channel system, bringing in its wake the burden of retaining existing audiences and attracting new ones. With its attendant corollary effects and ‘soft’ concepts such as brand personality through differentiation, brand attributes and reputation, media branding coupled with audience involvement,

has been identified as the likely alternative to guarantee the much-desired brand equity. This is the consumer perception and experience of the brand's value that most marketers realise (Aris & Bughin 2005; Biel 2003:4).

Subsequent to the above, media brand building efforts have intensified, and for media industries, a major branding strategy adopted is that of brand extension. The online digital brand extensions of traditional news media outlets in the form of websites and social media platforms (Ha & Chan-Olmsted 2001; Norbärk 2005) have, therefore, been to catch up with the competition and also take advantage of the information sharing platform that new media provides. Generally, brand extensions have been conceptualised to mean increasing product portfolios by adding new services and concurrently maintaining a constantly steady number of brands (Baumgarth 2004; Casper 2002). According to Chang and Chan-Olmsted (2010:641), "media brand extension is the use of established media brand names to introduce new products." Brand extensions generally comprise two broad categories, horizontal and vertical (Farquhar 1989). Horizontal brand extension considers the introduction of a new product either in the same product class as the parent brand (line extension) or a completely new product category (category extension) (Ian 2010; Keller 2003; Pitta & Katsanis 1995). Vertical extension, on the other hand, is said to have taken place when a parent brand introduces a similar product in the category of its offerings but of a different quality or price (Keller & Aaker 1992). Vertical brands, similar to horizontal brands, have two variations – up-scale and down-scale (Kim & Lavack 1996; Xie 2008). Up-scale vertical extension refers to introducing a product of a higher quality and higher price compared to the parent brand. Down-scale vertical extension means extending a brand with lower quality and price. Radio online digital brand extensions

as new product lines of traditional radio are referred to as *cross-media product line extensions* because the new channel falls within the same product category as the parent company. There could also be *cross-media brand extensions*, when the new product line of book production, for example, is added to the radio parent brand. *Non-media product extensions* are also possible when non-media products are introduced as additions to a media product.

Brand extension strategies are undertaken on the assumption that they will reduce initial marketing costs, reduce product-introduction risk, enhance advertising effectiveness, reinforce positioning, improve market share, and enhance the prospects of success by fostering consumer acceptance (Aaker 1990; Smith & Park 1992). The advantage of such brand extensions is that they capitalise on the strength and brand equity build-up of the parent brand. As such, they do not experience much difficulty to gain acceptance (Chan-Olmsted 2006) once the parent brand has consumer appeal. As media products are experience goods, media audiences count on their experiences with the parent brand to infer the quality of the extension. This means that, experience with the parent-brand increases an audiences' expectation that the quality of the extension would be high or on par with the parent brand. Therefore, consumers with greater satisfaction of a parent-brand experience, will be more likely to try the extension.

Previous non-media studies have evaluated the acceptance of brand extensions based on the quality, attributes and reputation of the parent brand. Some studies found that, the higher the strength of the parent brand among competing brands, the more

positive the attitude of consumers to the brand extension (Casper 2002; Völckner 2003). Another study by Hättöy (1989) confirmed that, the stronger the extrinsic associations formed with the parent brand, the more positive the attitude of consumers towards the extensions. Bhat and Reddy (2001) discovered that the higher the perceived product fit of the parent brand, the more positive the attitude of consumers towards add-on extensions. Park, Milberg and Lawson (1991), in an earlier study, found that, the more consistent or concurrent a brand extension is perceived to be to the parent brand, the more positive the attitude towards the brand extension. Finally, the more positive the attitude of consumers to the add-on or product extensions, the higher the future purchase intentions.

The story is not always rosy with brand extension because some strategies have been found not to work properly for some brands. A study by Jia and Jing (2012), to analyse the challenges and opportunities in brand extensions using the Yamaha Corporation and Virgin Group as case studies, told two different stories. It found that, while Yamaha recorded a success story of extending its Yamaha musical instruments with Yamaha motorbikes, Virgin Group failed in its strategies to extend their Virgin Atlantic Airways services with Virgin Cola. Arguably, one would have assumed that, because Virgin Group was extending its brand with a manufacturing wing which still dwelt within the hospitality industry, they would record a success story, but the story was different. Statistics from various product and service categories prove that there is about eighty-four percent (84%) failure rate among brand extensions (Ernst 1999; Marketing, 2003), with only about fifty percent (50%) of successful brand extensions surviving after three years of their introduction (Taylor 2004).

The use of online media brands, such as websites and social media platforms like WhatsApp and Twitter, has created an opportunity for traditional media outlets to reach new segments of their market. It has also created a loyal relationship with their audiences through the interactive platforms that the online brands afford. This participative approach has been identified as more effective than the functional approach, making it the new face of media branding (Chan-Olmsted 2011; Mooney & Rollins 2008). This calls for strategic branding of gatekeeping activities, including target audience-specific news, information and language, which are interactive enough to involve the participation of media audiences. The digital media industry provides versatility and advantages that means “Media is no longer a monolithic; one-size fits all industry that caters to all” (Kumar & Venkatesakumar 2015:52). The emerging trend is “The convergence among the multi-modal delivery platforms to deliver content catering to unique and distinguishable needs of the audience” (Kumar & Venkatesakumar 2015:52).

Major benefits achieved by traditional media brands and their online digital brand extensions in integrating their audiences into their programming is that of loyalty to the media outlet (Flint, Blocker & Boutin 2011) and satisfaction of their programming (Christodoulides, Jevons & Bonhomme 2012). This then leads to referrals and news diffusion. This is because the audiences spend more time with the media brand, they deal more intensely with it and also develop stronger connections with the brand (Czolkoss & Schmid-Petri 2012). Intransigent and loyal audiences are crucial to the success of a media brand in the online environment, where switching costs are low.

The concepts of audience integration-loyalty relationships and attitude-behaviour consistency have been analysed from a theoretical perspective, using theories such as reasoned action and planned behavior (Kotler et al. 2012); involvement theory (Berger & Milkman 2012; Canter 2013; Oyedemi 2007); and the uses and gratifications theory (Chung & Nah 2009; Ko, Cho & Roberts 2005; Yoo 2011).

Economically, media brand extensions create a competitive advantage for news media organisations to be differentiated from among the lot, while serving other segments of audiences. Additionally, because of the nature of media products as experience goods (Chang & Chan-Olmsted 2010:641), the credibility of a parent brand is often bestowed on the brand extension. A study by Chang and Chan-Olmsted (2010) on the success of four cable television network brand extensions in the United States of America, with a focus on the parent network, concluded that brand extensions of a parent channel with strong brand equity had a high possibility of success since this could be transferred to the brand extension. Additionally, if viewers of the parent channel consisted of younger audience members, brand extensions from the parent channel were poised for competitive advantage in attracting potential viewers. As part of the findings, constructs such as parent brand attitude, brand portfolio quality variance, the number perception of sub-brands, perceived fit, and innovativeness were found to significantly affect brand extension attitudes. This was found to be consistent with previous studies in different product areas (see Bhat & Reddy 2001; McCarthy, Heath & Milberg 2001). However, when brand extension attributes are inconsistent with that of the parent brand or the 'fit' between the parent brand and brand extension are not strong, there could be a dilution effect on branding activities. This will negatively impact on the success of branding (Loken & John 1993; Matinez & Pina 2003).



### **3.4 News media gatekeeping as a media branding feature**

A brand is a distinguishing feature intended to identify a product or service from those of competitors. Among the media fraternity, brands often present themselves in the form of “star power” (Chan-Olmsted & Cha 2008 33; Hickey 2003), logos, sound effects, visual effects, slogans and other special effects to differentiate one media organisation from another. Traditional news media outlets understand the changing nature of their business and acknowledge that in the midst of the duplication of roles, one of their strongest differentiation points will be to hold onto something that not everyone in the industry today can do – normative gatekeeping (Heinderyckx & Vos 2016:33). Traditional news media gatekeepers have held on to their normative gatekeeping roles from the original static traditional media formats to the online digital platforms because they perceive it as a professional normative responsibility and a function to provide objective and credible news to their audiences. Their standardised job routines and time spent helps to make relevant choices to project their core identities, as well as what they stand for. This differentiation, which has become a part of their daily routines, distinguishes them from the flood of competitors, thereby, promoting the use of that function to develop their brand identity or personality (Phillips 2015; Carlson & Usher 2016).

In media branding, Siegert, Gerth and Rademacher (2011) allude to the fact that media outlets signal the quality of their news coverage and other programmes through the brand’s identity or personality. This is communicated to their audiences and further influences how their audiences perceive them. With this as a basis, they caution media

outlets about the complex media environment, responsibilities and tensions that arise in striking a balance in decision making between the journalistic and commercialisation aspects of news and programme content production. This can make a media outlet either a market-driven media brand or a quality-driven media brand.

Commercialisation or market-driven media brands refer to the growing importance of market considerations such as advertising-friendly journalism, which bring about financial gratification. It projects a market orientation of “news that sells” (Hamilton 2004) and a “market driven” (McManus 1994) philosophy, limiting the quality of information, education and entertainment orientations of the media space. Additionally, audiences are perceived as consumers and not as citizens who desire critical content. When this function of commercial media branding activity is projected more than that of the journalistic media branding activity, Siegert, Gerth and Rademacher (2011) note that it dilutes the media’s core business. Siegert (2015:358) adds that there is no surety that market or commercially driven media brands lead to high quality journalism. This is because the economic imperative always comes to play. This is where, although media outlets claim to have a customer-driven approach, they also work at meeting audience needs with the lowest investment of resources, which can guarantee high profits for their outlets.

Aside the commercialisation and market-driven media branding decisions, the other aspect involves journalistic media branding decisions. This considers the editorial and content decisions made to provide quality information, thus, projecting the image and core duty of the media outlet. When media branding decisions are skewed towards

journalistic decision-making, it leads to developing a journalistic media brand, which informs citizens about important topics, reports critically on political and economic issues, and serves as an arena for debate. Thus, leading citizens to make enlightened choices (Anderson 2007; McNair 2007; Siegert 2015). Siegert (2015:356) draws a sociological neoinstitutionalism analogy by observing that much as Corporate Social Responsibility is a ritual for some industries, a media brand's commitment to high quality journalism is "most of all a ritual to address societal expectations." Further, Siegert (2015:357) provides a dichotomy of quality promises that media brands project, when he notes that:

We have to differentiate between two kinds of quality promise[s]. First, the phrase "quality promise" refers to the general promise all media brands give in relation to the general characteristics of their products which aim at fulfilling the audience's expectation, e.g. the informative or entertaining character of the offered content, or the complexity of the stories ... Secondly, a media brand could also promise journalism or news coverage of high quality, which means journalism that adheres to professional journalistic culture, e.g. it selects important issues, frames issues suitably and gives the right context; i.e. journalism that aims at professional journalistic norms, such as objectivity, impartiality and topicality. In this case, a media brand is a "quality promise" of high journalistic quality.

Though all media outlets claim to stand for quality and make that promise to their audiences and would-be audiences, as the first definition of 'quality promise' argued by Siegert (2015:357) shows, the second definition is what media outlets actually do and that is what media audiences look out for. That is, to rate the media in terms of the quality of their journalism which creates a desire for association or not. Siegert's (2015:357) second definition highlights the importance of media gatekeeping activities, like story selection and framing, in defining the quality of a media brand. This gives credence to the fact that every detail of activity undertaken, even at the blind side of media audiences, adds up to the brand personality projected by the media

outlet. These bring out the differences between media outlets and how they are perceived.

The dimensions of Aaker's (1991) brand equity model, which projects how a brand can increase its market share, are awareness, perceived quality, brand associations and brand loyalty. Awareness creation brings the existence of the brand to the attention of audiences, and they sometimes explore the product if it is new. Exploring helps the audience experience the quality of unknown brands. For brand extensions, however, the quality is assessed based on the perceived quality of the parent company. When the brand personality of the media product is found to be congruent with that of the audience, they make associations with it, and the continued use leads to loyalty. Media organisations cannot survive solely on the quality they profess to give but must also promote the quality identity and differentiation they provide which 'sounds' the quality bell in the eyes and ears of media audiences.

Using the Media, Brands, Actors and Communication (MBAC) model, Siegert, Gerth and Rademacher (2011) unearthed how media brand identity could serve as a decision-making tool for designing brand and journalistic content. This is central to this study because, as they note, in spite of the structure-conduct-performance (Hendriks 1995; McQuail 1992) market drivers, media brand managers make decisions on the brand identity to be projected by the media house by drawing a balance between editorial decisions/journalistic orientations and management decisions/market orientations. The structure-conduct-performance market drivers include the political, social, regulative and technological environment within which media organisations

operate. By the orientation favoured, the media brand position is determined by the quantity and quality of news coverage. This, in turn, defines the media brand image and media brand reputation to be communicated to and observed by media audiences and the general public. These decisions subsequently impact the major and delicate gatekeeping strategies and journalistic orientations that news media organisations uphold in terms of target audiences to reach; the types of news stories they select, publish and follow up; image selection; language choice and writing style; and even the way their anchors present themselves in hosting programmes. These gatekeeping and editorial decisions affirm the fact that gatekeeping goes beyond creating, sharing and redistributing information or the in-and-out selection decision of news items. Rather, it means every process of transforming information about events into news stories (Shoemaker & Vos 2009).

By deliberate brand decision-making and effort, “quality can still be a choice” (Siegert, Gerth & Rademacher 2011:55), on the premise that “media companies continually [choose to] produce news coverage of good quality only when such an orientation is part of their media brand identity” (Siegert, Gerth & Rademacher 2011:55). Thus, calling for purposeful effort through institutional arrangements to put gatekeeping and editorial policies in place to achieve quality journalism through branding. This is because “successful media brands are not only tools for marketing communications but lead to brand culture and brand behavior within an organisation” (Siegert 2015:360). Aside their brand names, slogans or logos, media outlets can make conscious efforts to be perceived by their audiences as sources of quality and credible news, and engage with their audiences on that principle. For traditional media, the quality of their journalistic and editorial values has earned them this hallmark over the

years, though some solely online news organisations also choose to provide quality news and programming. Entman (2005:58) has noted that traditional media pursue two central objectives which they are able to balance in the production. The first is “reporting on important events, people and issues, particularly those involving governmental institutions and actors, in ways that are accurate and balanced”. This main function is accurately undertaken by traditional media because they often have the structure and resources to do it well. The second objective is that of “generating sufficient advertising and circulation revenue to make profit regarded by the stock market or private owners as acceptable”. This is affirmed by Russ-Mohl and Nazhdiminova (2015) who opine that, for traditional media, strong brands are seen as “the ‘natural’ outcome of good journalism”. This gives value to Siegert’s (2015:356) claim that journalistic content is not just an experienced good, but a credence good because it is based on evidential and verifiable information.

Brand building requires time, planning, perseverance, and an understanding of customers, competitors and the business environment (Ghodeswar 2008:4). These are taken care of as part of brand management to produce the desired results. Thus, motivating a “firm’s willingness to invest in the programs needed for the brand to live up to its customer expectation” (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000) and core mandate. The desired brand personality is not built in a day. Through daily mindful efforts and actions, news media institutions portray their intended character as they want their audiences to identify them with. It is on this premise that, traditional media has over the years carefully worked on its credibility and so their perception index among the general audience cluster is higher than solely online news brands without traditional

media affiliation (Boczkowski & De Santos 2007; Bruns 2005; Pew Research Center 2010).

Normative gatekeeping, whether on traditional or online digital media, must emphasise news significance and, as such, exercise a moral obligation regarding news values and content. Though traditional media is generally perceived to have responded well to this, it is not often found with media audiences and some solely online news media outlets. Traditional news media gatekeepers conceive their roles as normative moral obligations to society so that, over the years, there has been consistency and the standard in gatekeeping has largely been upheld. The active participation of media audiences in the news process in the digital era notwithstanding, the gatekeeping they perform has been theorised as limited. Thus, it does not often match up to what is performed by professional gatekeepers. Singer (2014), for instance, conceptualised audiences as 'secondary gatekeepers', whose gatekeeping activities are auxiliary to that of professional gatekeepers. Even on networked social media and online digital platforms, where scholars are proposing networked gatekeeping theories as substitutes for contemporary gatekeeping, the gatekeeping roles and functions of journalists have been holding the fort, distinguishing them from non-professional journalists such as netizens (Bourdieu 2005; Carlson & Usher 2016). This emphasises that the core distinctiveness of any brand is the "central, timeless essence of the brand that remains constant as the brand moves to new markets and new products" (Ghodeswar 2008:5).

The next section discusses brand personality, which is the mental identity feature conceived by audiences when they engage with brands. Its essence is discussed, projecting how it aids news diffusion. The section below serves as a prelude to the next chapter which discusses the dimensions of brand personality in detail.

### **3.5 Brand personality**

The brand identity communicated by organisations to consumers and media audiences is often conceived as a personality. As such, products and services are given human characteristics like emotional, sophistication, excitement and ethical dimensions (Aaker 1997; Gobe 2001). Consumers conceive an objective or subjective mental or pictorial imagery of various brands and, often, this is the first reaction and stimulus that people have when they hear about or see a product belonging to a particular brand. Brand personality, therefore, serves as the face and provides a symbolic or self-expressive function for a brand (Elliot & Wattanasuwan 1998; Keller, cited by Aaker 1997:347; Das, Prakash & Khattri 2012), awakening interest in consumers on the personality they hold (Naresh 2012). The human-like traits found in brands help customers to establish brand connection and “with the personality metaphor in place, relationship development becomes clearer and more motivating” (Aaker 1997) to promote the brand.

Aaker (1997:347) has provided a widely acclaimed definition of brand personality as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand”. Aaker (1997) conceived brand personality within the consumer product lines which often have various brands of similar products. Over time, this concept has found its way, and has also been



accepted, within the media fraternity, largely because of the competitive multichannel environment enabled by the internet, technological advancement and new media affordances. Research suggests that consumers patronise brands because of the human characteristics associated with the brand (Aaker 1997) and because the products have congruent individual personalities (Chan-Olmsted & Cha 2008; Neresh 2012). The success of brands often depends on consumers allowing themselves to “become part of the experience of being with the product” (Firat & Dholakia, cited in Arvidsson 2006:35). Brand personality gives a brand a face and customers base their decision not only on the differentiating and functional position, but also on the likeable personality of the brand. Subsequently, the stronger the relationship built with the brand, the more one is able to build congruity with the brand (Phau & Lau 2001). Travis (2000:10) observed that “The power of any brand is simply how your associations with it make you feel”. For media brands, most importantly, branding is a critical response to the stiff competition originating from digital communication technologies (Galbi 2001). As such, a successful brand results in strategic brand positioning and equity in the market. Brand personality is important to achieve brand loyalty, the formation of favourable attitudes towards a particular brand, and the effort to enlarge brand equity (Seimiene & Kamarauskaite 2014).

As discussed in Chapter Two, traditional media gatekeepers find themselves in competition with online digital news media gatekeepers and public/citizen/online user gatekeepers as content producers, calling for urgent steps to give them a competitive advantage and also make them stand out. Media companies often adopt product and outlet differentiation activities, as an identification and distinguishing feature, to identify them from competitors, while simultaneously building the much-desired competitive

edge (Kim, Baek & Martin 2010:117). While some media organisations brand themselves with their “star power” (Chan-Olmsted & Cha 2008:33; Hickey 2003) as what identifies them, others use names, terms, sign, design, heritage, symbols, consumer and corporate images, key benefits, price and distribution, logos, sounds, amongst other special effects or a combination of them (Cruz & Lee 2014; Kotler, Bliemel & Keller 2007; Wee 2004). Sung and Kim (2010) posit that brand personality building is an effective way to distinguish a product from those of competitors and enhance effective marketing. Positive brand personality provides a privileged position for the brand because of the niche it creates for itself which translates into customer loyalty. Media marketers need to emphasise the relevant characteristics of their brand personality, which would help provide amazing new understandings that lead to strategic changes of positioning and communication for their brands (Naresh 2012).

Media branding activities for product and media outlet differentiation have intensified. As news organisations abound, they offer news that is similar, and it is difficult to attract media audiences solely on the basis of functional attributes such as news content (Kim, Baek & Martin 2010:117). Biel (2003:4), for instance, has noted that, “functional differences between brands are becoming ever more trivial” and Aaker (1997) argues that product attributes alone are not sufficient to build a strong brand. The new media ‘brandsphere’ in the digital media environment, has dramatically changed, becoming complex, with the need to understand audiences and build relationships with them. Chan-Olmsted (2011) is of the view that, the significant approach to media branding in the digital era is formulating audience-centered brand strategies. Branding efforts have moved beyond mere logos or symbols into a participative approach, where audiences are engaged more richly, meaningfully and deeply in interactive

relationships to develop brand participation (Chan-Olmsted 2011; Mooney & Rollins 2008). Chan-Olmsted (2011:3) expressed this by noting that:

The branding efforts in the media industries will become more complex when the world of marketing is turned upside down by the arrival of Web 2.0, with social media acting as a new means of connecting with consumers personally, interactively, and collectively.

In its traditional setting, radio lacked interaction with audiences compared to newspapers which imbibed the 'letters to the editor' to take contributions from their audiences. However, overtime, radio incorporated participatory activities, where audiences could send text messages via their phone or call into live programmes to make contributions. With radio moving onto digital platforms, audiences could comment or contribute on comment boards through the media websites. Mobile phone technologies and social media added a new dynamism to audience participation in programmes, where they could now comment and share links of news stories on radio online brand extensions to other digital platforms, alongside the other activities on traditional radio. Media brands should be viewed based on their mutual benefit to the company and the audience. Even in the digital era, where audiences take an active part in news creation and sharing, they largely depend on news organisations as credible news sources since they lack the professional news gathering potential. Arvidsson (2006:70), therefore, suggests that they should be seen as active partners to the media development process or as co-producers, instead of competitors.

### **3.6 How a successful media brand personality impacts audiences' news diffusion on digital news platforms**

The concept of brand personality explains how consumer perception of a brand impacts the relationship built with the brand and their behaviour towards the brand (Ambroise 2006). A well-established brand personality influences consumer preference, patronage and, ultimately, develops strong consumer emotional ties (Biel, cited in Cruz & Lee 2014). This implies that, audience perception of a media outlet influences their association, acceptance and consumption of their products. Research suggests that brand personality is positively correlated to brand engagement for specific brands (Cruz & Lee 2014; Vivek, Beatty & Morgan 2012). As such, with a positive brand personality, loyalty on the part of customers is almost certain. Zhang, Wang & Zhao (sa) explored the effect of brand personality on brand loyalty in companies' microblogging, using Sina Weibo, a popular microblogging site in China. They found that when customers and media audiences follow the microblog of a brand, they are able to build brand loyalty with the brand based on the brand personality. Most researchers of branding maintain that brand personality plays an important role in generating customer engagement with a brand (Goldsmith & Goldsmith 2012). To the extent that, a positive media brand personality attracts audience attention, leading to prolonged brand engagement with the brand, and loyalty on the part of media audiences. Hille and Bakker (2013) classify audience integration with media in two pathways on the basis of their behavioral engagement with online digital media brands. The first group relates to news distributors or diffusers engaged with the online media brand by sharing or liking articles on social media, through messaging apps, or through email. The second group is known to participate by creating user-generated content or comments on journalistic articles.

Consumer brand engagement has been defined to mean “a multidimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional and/or behavioural dimensions, and plays a central role in the process of relational exchange, where other relational concepts are engagement antecedents and/or consequences in iterative engagement processes within the brand community” (Brodie, Ilic, Juric & Hollobeck 2011). Media audiences give thought to various considerations in choosing a brand and, as the definition makes clear, people make mental decisions on emotional attachment to brands that define their behaviour towards a media brand. Once a choice is made, consumers like to share their experiences with people they know, as well as those they share the brand with – the brand community. A brand community may be viewed as a group of people who possess a shared interest in a specific brand, forming a parallel social universe with the brand’s myths, values, rituals, vocabulary and hierarchy (Cover & Pace 2006). Translated into the online media fraternity, when people engage with a media brand, a relationship is built between people with similar interests in a news outlet, especially when they engage in liking and commenting on news stories. Sometimes, audiences interact with other audiences they may not know, but share the same media interest. Brand communities, as part of their brand engagement, may facilitate information sharing; concern for consumers; self-enhancement and advice seeking; social benefits; economic benefits; platform assistance and helping the media company propagate the history and culture of the brand; and provide assistance to other consumers within the community (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler 2004; Laroche, Habibi, Richard & Sankaranarayanan 2012).

Aside from brand communities, satisfied audiences tend to advertise their favourite media outlets' programmes and news stories to people within their personal network or inner circles. This is achieved through sharing links and headlines, thus, widely diffusing the content of the outlet and improving its market share. Most firms, through their marketing strategies, drive at making consumers believe in and recognise their brand personality, and reinforcing the relationship between the brand and the consumer (Govers & Schoormans 2005; Seimiene & Kamarauskaite 2014). These efforts, it has been argued, helps to increase customer loyalty to their brand and enjoy brand referrals, thereby, increasing the brand's equity. While individuals exercise some form of gatekeeping in deciding which content and means will achieve faster and broader diffusion (Cappella, Kim & Albarracin 2015; Chen & Berger 2013; Ma, Sian Lee & Goh 2014), there is also a decision as to which audience will spread the information faster and wider based on their connections (Ihm & Kim 2012:4351); and which information will be of gratification to the intended audience. Subsequently, the more connected and active the audience, the faster and wider the news content is spread.

Based on the findings and conclusions from previous studies, Brodie, Ilic, Juric and Hollebeek (2011) listed a number of consequences of consumer brand engagement to include: trust (Hollebeek 2011); satisfaction and loyalty (Bowden 2009); commitment, emotional connection and attachment (Chan & Li 2010); empowerment; and consumer value (Gruen, Osmonbekov & Czaplewski 2006). For online brand community engagements, such as engaging consumers on the social media platform Twitter and online news websites, Cover and Pace (2006) affirm that the concepts of loyalty, commitment and empowerment are more prominent than other concepts. This

assertion suggests that when media audiences feel attached to the brand personality of their preferred online news media outlet, they are empowered to prolong engagement through frequent interactions like commenting and tweeting, thus, breeding commitment and loyalty to that brand. Motivation to engage with virtual or online brands could be varied, in that people have different reasons for engaging with them. Among other reasons, brand engagement could help in enhancing consumer identification; fulfil psychological and social needs; and develop corporate feelings with the brand (Elliot & Wattanasuwan 1998; Hoppe, Matzler & Terlutter 2007; Laroche, Habibi, Richard & Sankaranarayanan 2012; McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig 2002).

Online news editors working in online digital news platforms take advantage of the networked environment to diffuse their news stories through social media platforms such as Twitter, WhatsApp and Instagram. On such platforms, news audiences and users are already connected (Marwick & Boyd 2011) and, as such, share information among themselves. This guarantees a wider and faster diffusion of information to a broader audience than traditional media would have achieved.

### **3.7 Summary**

This chapter has discussed branding in general and how it presents itself as star power, slogans, logo and special effects in media circles. It was found that, media branding has been necessitated by intense audience-attention competition, competing products, converged technologies and audience fragmentation brought about by globalisation, digitisation of media and interactive technologies in the multichannel, digital era. Branding presents advantages to both the media organisation and its

audiences. Compared to marketing, branding is relatively new to media. Thus, explicitly or implicitly, media branding draws on marketing and marketing communication models to conceptualise media brands into five perspectives, as a product, an extension, an identity, a differentiation and an equity.

Media branding presents critical decision-making on the part of media managers regarding their marketing/business/commercialisation and editorial orientations. While these have been found to be in contention, the ability to draw a balance between them dictates the media identity or personality projected to media audiences. The core duty of the media to educate, inform and entertain was discussed, as well positioned when the editorial orientation was projected. This serves to meet the expectations of media audiences, informing the attachment and associations they have with media brands, leading to continued use and then loyalty.

It has been observed that, in spite of the internet and new media affordances increasing news sources, traditional media continually perform their normative gatekeeping roles and functions even on digital platforms. This has distinguished them from the numerous news channels, earning them many followers. There were also discussions of how news media gatekeeping has served as a brand identity and personality tool for traditional news media outlets, even on digital platforms, allowing them to differentiate their news from those of ordinary citizens and even solely online news platforms without traditional media affiliation. This has given traditional media some essential perceived credibility.



The concept of brand personality was discussed, and it was noted that good media brand personality positions the media outlet or product well. It ensures they are able to achieve the much-needed customer-based brand equity which guarantees a wide distribution of their news products in the digital media environment.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### MODELLING BRAND PERSONALITY: THE GATEKEEPING FACTOR

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the concept of brand personality with its attendant dimensions. It focuses on how it has been methodologically approached and modeled by other researchers and scholars over the years. The chapter offers constructive critique on the theoretical underpinnings and personality trait considerations in brand personality dimension construction. As an essential part of this study, research into brand personality suggests that most studies on media audience behaviour and brand personality modelling have, like the strategic marketing origin, concentrated on human characteristics as dimensions for media brand personality building, thus lacking adequate theoretical backbone. Though human personality and brand personality have sometimes been positioned as the theoretical foundations for brand personality, further studies have countered this position, instead suggesting that brand perception of non-human commodities vary significantly from human personality characteristics. Much brand personality modelling has been derived empirically, with later studies wholly or partially adopting brand personality traits and dimensions from previous studies. These studies have often aimed at understanding why people patronise and are also attached to certain media brands.

The chapter will survey various media brand personality dimensions and, particularly, add to the brand personality literature by submitting that brand personality projection by organisations is largely a signalling agenda to draw the attention of media audiences and consumers to the media organisation and its products. To that effect,

this chapter proposes the adoption of signalling theory (Spence 1973) as an umbrella theory for brand personality construction and modelling. Further, the chapter suggests the inclusion of theoretically derived and empirically tested dimensions and constructs, like news media gatekeeping, which in spite of the massive changes in the media landscape over decades, has remained the same. Additionally, unlike most acclaimed brand personality dimensions that are contextually and media-category-specific, gatekeeping is non-contextual, non-category limited, and can be applied within the Ghanaian and African context without issue. The purpose is to assist the traditional media fraternity in appreciating the impact and importance of their age-old professional gatekeeping routine in improving the status of their brands, as well as securing and maintaining their financial sustainability, especially with the addition of digital brands.

## **4.2 Brand personality defined**

Brand personality has been defined as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker 1997:347). As discussed in the preceding chapter, the objective or subjective mental or pictorial imagery that consumers often perceive upon seeing or hearing a brand is the brand personality. Media channels represent particular sensations that appeal to different sectors of audiences and are identified or selected based on the ‘personality’ they project. Based on this, media channels can be identified as media brands. As such, they are carriers of brand personalities that influence media audiences based on the ‘personality’ profile they present. A study by Slabbinck and Roozen (2008) to find a relationship between brand and media brand personalities of ten radio stations and ten airlines in Belgium used Callebaut’s taxonomy and Factorial Correspondence Analysis (FCA) on an audience self-pick of

twenty-four personality characteristics to describe the radio channels. This was done in a bid to prove that different media channels had different personality dimensions that are communicated to their audiences. In turn, audiences were not unaware of these personalities. The brand personality dimensions that individual audiences identified radio channels with, from the list of twenty-four, were found to be consistent among all the audiences within the sample size.

The study again found that, audiences chose to listen to media outlets based on these personality characteristics. In the study, popular youth radio channels were chosen by audiences as playful, happy and easy-going channels; while national radio stations that broadcast news and other critical information were plotted as 'serious' radio channels with dimensions like intelligent, structured and pragmatic. Brand personality, therefore, serves as a face and symbolic or self-expressive function for the brand (Elliot & Wattanasuwan 1998; Keller, cited by Aaker 1997:347). Research suggests that brand personality building is an effective way to distinguish a product from those of competitors and enhances effective marketing (Sung & Kim 2010). Positive brand personality provides a privileged position for the brand because of the niche it creates for itself which translates into customer-based brand equity and, subsequently, customer loyalty. Media marketers need to emphasise the relevant characteristics of their brand personality. This would help provide amazing new understandings that lead to strategic changes of positioning and communication for their brands (Naresh 2012). This, as a result of the fact that consumers and media audiences choose stations based on the relatedness or congruence of a media outlet to their personality trait.

The following subsection discusses various brand personality models and dimensions applied in media research. While this study does not intend to adopt any of the brand personality scales for analysis, it demonstrates how previous researchers have approached brand personality over time and what has informed the formulation of dimensions and traits. Such a review, it is argued, will help to identify the potential gaps and inadequacies in brand personality modelling. In addition, it will inform the formulation of a conceptual framework which will be applicable in the Ghanaian media, which has limited research in this regard.

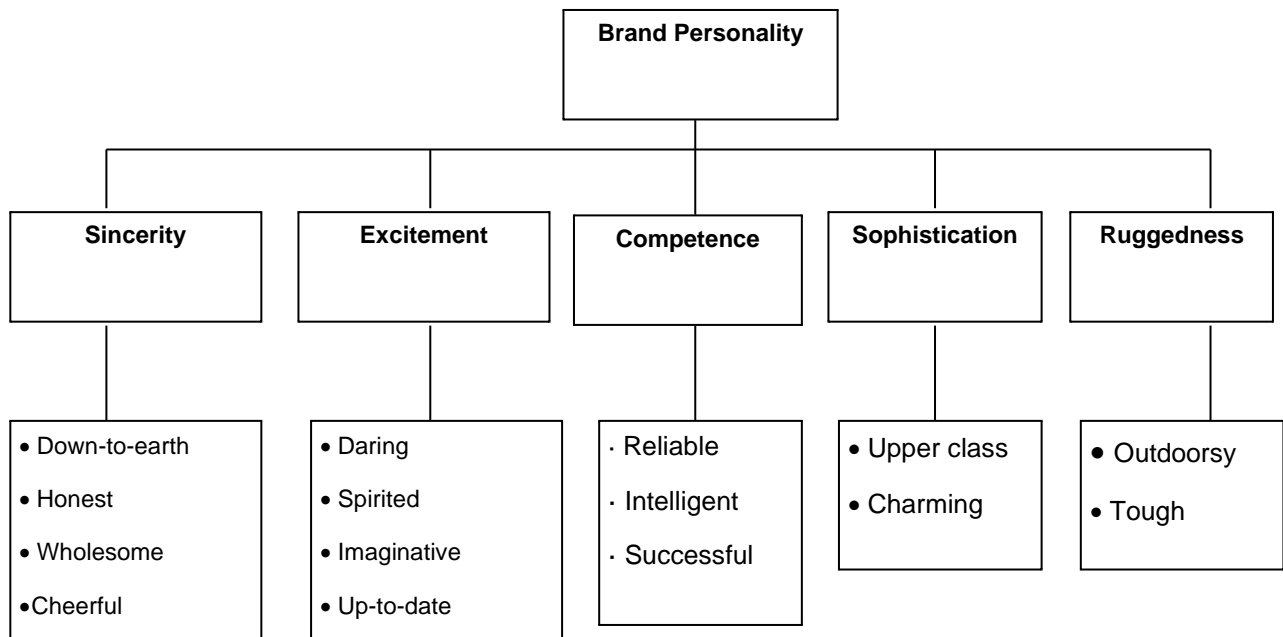
### **4.3 Dimensions of brand personality**

Modelling brand personality pre-dates Aaker's (1997) dimension building (see Big Five Prototypes – John 1990; NEO model – McCrae & Costa 1989; Inter-Circumplex model – McCrae & Costa 1989; Norman 1963; ACL – Piedmont, McCrae & Costa 1991; and Tupes & Christal 1958), however, her dimensions have been widely acclaimed. While new literature on generic and product-specific models emerge with 'new' dimensions, many of the supposed new dimensions often contain measurement constructs and items which are the same as, or similar to, previous scales but have different labels (Davies et al. 2018:115). This reflects the homogeneity of such studies. The following sub-sections discuss some of the popular models applied in the media literature.

#### **4.3.1 Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality Dimensions**

The macro brand personality scale proposed by Aaker (1997) has been largely accepted to construct brand personality for various product categories. Aaker (1997)

suggested that consumers perceive brands as assuming or developing personality and human characteristics, much like human beings, over time. Additionally, that customers patronise brands whose attributes are congruent with theirs and, therefore, want to associate with them. Aaker (1997) proposed five dimensions to brand personality (Figure 4.1): sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness, which have various measurement items or sub dimensions. Sincere brands were perceived to capture the idea of warmth and acceptance (Aaker 1997:353), where customers see the brand to be lively and, as such, they embrace it based on the mental perception of its warmth. It is measured by the following facets: down-to-earth, honest, wholesome and cheerful. The excitement personality dimension, measured by the constructs daring, spirited, imaginative and up to date, embodies brands that possess energetic and youthful attributes that appeal to younger demographics (Aaker, Fournier & Brasel 2004). The third dimension, competence, is measured by the constructs reliable, intelligent and successful. Sophistication connotes brands that are known to be flashy and ostentatious in nature, measured by the upper-class and charming facets. Ruggedness measures the perception of toughness of a brand, measured by outdoorsy and tough.



**Figure 4.1 Brand personality framework (Aaker 1997:352)**

While Aaker's scale was developed for the consumer product market, it has steadily made appearances in media literature. This, largely because of the need to identify how media audiences make decisions on which brand to listen to or follow in the multichannel, digital environment. A study by Langstedt and Hunt (2017) applied Aaker's (1997) brand personality dimensions model in examining the brand personality characteristics of six major social media platforms namely, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Snapchat, Instagram and LinkedIn. The study applied the exact sub-constructs put forward by Aaker in measuring the six social media platforms. The findings suggested that the exciting brands, in descending order, were Pinterest and Instagram at a tie, followed by Snapchat, Facebook and then LinkedIn. Facebook and LinkedIn were found to be less exciting, possibly because they are the oldest of the six social media sites and the interest from audiences for them may have waned. Pinterest was found to be the most sophisticated and sincere brand, possibly because

of its smaller user-base. All six social media platforms were rated high in competence, with LinkedIn scoring the highest. Not surprisingly, as they have all gained high acceptance by media audiences. LinkedIn was found to be the most rugged and tough social media platform because the sample for the study, being college students, saw it as a platform for the elderly and so they did not use it. It has been noted that LinkedIn is “the only platform where those ages 30-64 are more likely to be users than those ages 18-29” (Duggan et al 2015), confirming Langstedt and Hunt’s (2017) findings.

In the Ghanaian context, Kesse (2017) conducted a study to identify the brand personality of Citi97.3 FM, an Accra based FM station using Aaker’s (1997) brand personality dimensions. He observed that Citi97.3 FM had positioned itself to provide “Relevant Radio Always”, so touted by the Citi Breakfast Show led by its anchor, Bernard Avle, and the ever visible and ‘extremely approachable’ Managing Director, Samuel Atta Mensah, Citi97.3 FM depicts a vocal, funny, intelligent, vibrant and affable brand. It, thus, portrays the sincere, exciting and intelligent dimensions in Aaker’s model.

Research suggests that Aaker’s (1997) macro brand personality dimensions, which have gained wide acceptance in consumer and media brand personality studies, have limited contextual applicability in non-North American settings (Aaker, Banet-Matinez & Garolera 2001; Davies, Chun, Da Silva & Roper 2001; Kim 2018; Wang & Yang 2008), thus, motivating the introduction of many new brand personality models with enhanced and multi-contextual dimensions. Additionally, considering the aggression that sometimes happens in media production, there has been criticism and



interrogation into why Aaker (1997) only included positive dimensions in her modelling (Ambroise 2006; Kim 2017; Valette-Florence & De Barnier 2013), limiting the possible application of this model in this study.

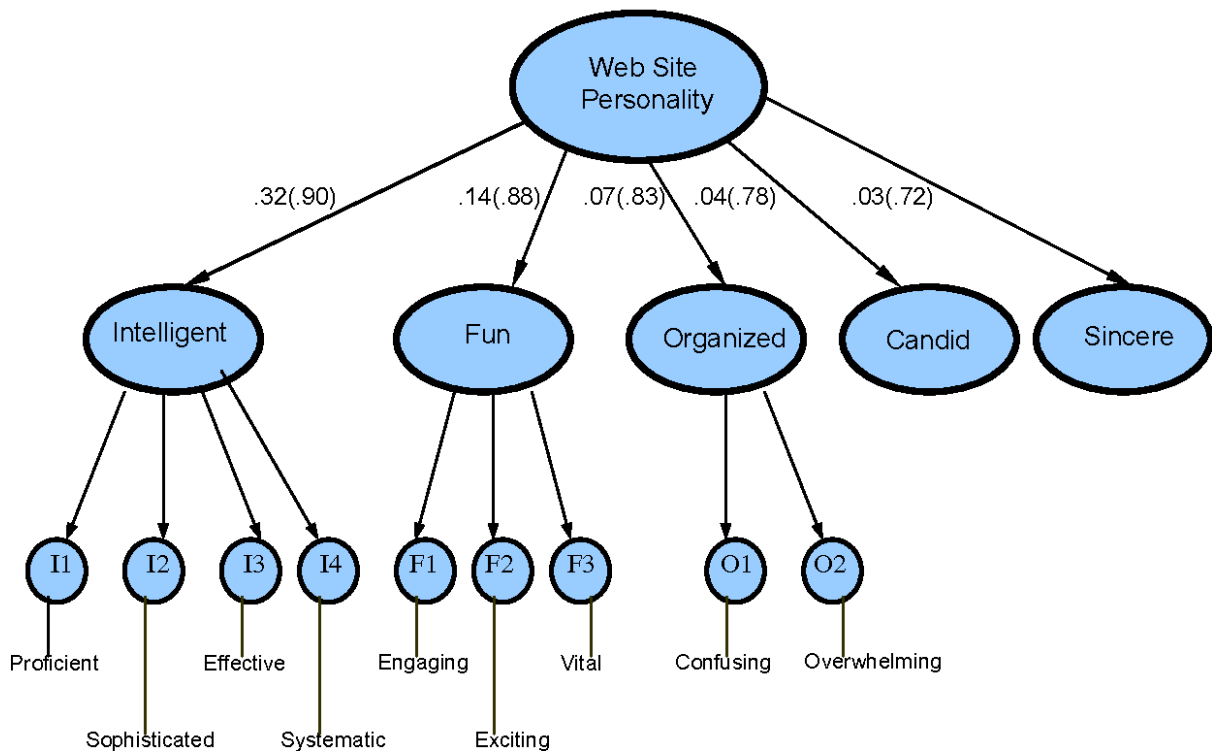
#### ***4.3.2 Chen and Rogers' model for measuring website personality***

In her conceptualisation of brand personality, Aaker (1997:353) established that the various dimensions had different impacts and influences according to different reasons and approaches. Similarly, media products differed from consumer goods and because media outlets were making waves on digital platforms, new sets of dimensions have been suggested by media scholars. One of the earliest studies on the dimension of media brand personality was developed by Chen and Rogers (2006). Their study, which was solely devoted to brand personality building for news websites, significantly departed from Aaker's (1997) 5-dimension model. They defined website personality as "the set of traits encompassing human characteristics and information technology features associated with a website" (Chen & Rogers 2006:35). They noted that it is similar to human personality and brand personality, which served as the theoretical basis. The major features of the website brand model were derived from the interactivity and design features which the platform provided that have not been adequately accounted for in previous brand personality models. Focusing on dispositional strategy, their brand personality modelling considered enduring strategies upon which individuals differ (Cattell 1945). The modelling was, therefore, based on the Big Five model (McCrae & John 1992), as an initial pool for inclusion of items into the dimension building, but other sources were included (for instance Almagor, Tellegen & Waller 1995; Benet & Waller 1995; Buss 1996, Henss 1996;

Saucier 1997; Tellegen & Waller 1987). Chen and Rogers (2006) argued that all media formats, from newspaper to television can now be accessed on the web, thus, they set out how website personality could drive audience preference and usage of websites. Their web version of brand personality modelling is largely a derivative of non-web brand personality models from previous empirical studies. With a sample size of 120 websites, which were randomly selected and also recommended, 141 items were generated with progressive reduction to propose five dimensions. These included intelligent, fun, organized, candid and sincere. Each of the dimensions have sub-constructs that measure them.

The dimension of intelligent, measured by proficient, sophisticated, effective and systematic, largely measures the competence and proficiency with which media outlets undertake their core production activities. The fun dimension is measured by engaging, exciting and vital, reflecting the interactivity of websites. The sincere dimension, similar to its position in the Big Five factor personality and Aaker's (1997) brand personality dimension, projects the idea of warmth and acceptance. The other two dimensions, candid and organised shifted from the human personality and brand personality in the Big Five factor model of personality and rather ropes in advertising-specific constructs, suggesting that websites are also used for advertising the company or its products. This finding signals the purpose of brand personality since it 'sells' the company and its products to potential audiences and consumers; and is of much relevance to this study (websites – digital/online media). They consider the information format of websites, inferring the "perceived ease of use," judging the design and presentation of the website, guiding users to have an overall good website experience to spend more time on the website. The organised dimension is measured

by confusing and overwhelming. They, thus, pertain to the information format in the website design. While this brand personality dimension model may have served as an excellent framework for this study considering that it measures brand personality in the digital environment, it is not grounded on any solid theoretical foundations and may not be applicable to social media.



**Figure 4.2 A Model for Measuring Web Site Personality (Dimensions and their Facets) (Chen & Rogers 2006:42)**

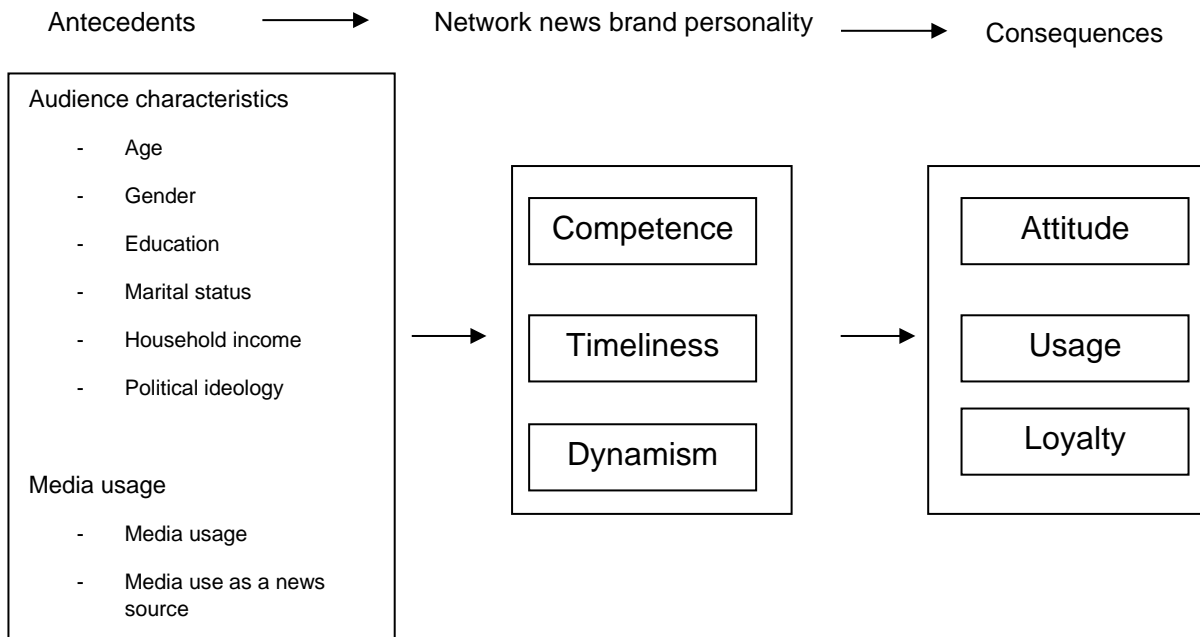
#### **4.3.3 Chan-Olmsted and Cha's (2008) network news brand personality framework**

Another media brand personality scale was developed by Chan-Olmsted & Cha (2008) for the television industry. The framework was conceptualised as the network news brand personality framework. They studied three cable network news brands (MSNBC, CNN and Fox News) and three broadcast network news brands (NBC News,

CBS News and ABC News). The study, which had two objectives, first aimed at investigating the antecedents that made people patronise news brands, as well as the factors that influenced their brand image perceptions. Second, the study aimed at assessing the effects of these brand image perceptions by audiences on attitudes, usage and loyalty towards the brands. The exploratory stage of the study enlisted 59 brand personality dimensions from two previous empirical studies by McDowell (2004) and Aaker (1997). Of the 59 dimensions, 17 were enlisted from McDowell's (2004) free-association brand perception study of three news networks, and the remaining 42 were the originally proposed brand personality dimensions, out of which Aaker (1997) had five emerging. After an initial survey and component factor analysis using varimax rotation, Chan-Olmsted & Cha (2008) provided three dimensions out of the 59. Their three dimensions included competence, timeliness and dynamism. These were found to influence audiences' television brand attachment. They observed that these dimensions determined audience attitudes, usage and loyalty to their preferred television news sources.

Competence was perceived as the television brand's capability to create a news product with personality traits like intelligent, honest, reliable, traditional, analytical and technical. Timeliness depicted the "timing" and "seasonedness" of news product delivery. Factor loadings for this dimension included time-related items such as up-to-date, contemporary and experienced. The final dimension, dynamism, was perceived to mean the lively, energetic and exciting images of a news product. The factors included trendy, masculine and daring. These findings were found to be consistent with the findings of Infante (1980), and Abdulla et al (2005) who found expertise

(competence), currency (timeliness) and dynamism (dynamism) as news credibility sources.



**Figure 4.3 Network news brand personality framework (Chan-Olmsted & Cha 2008:44)**

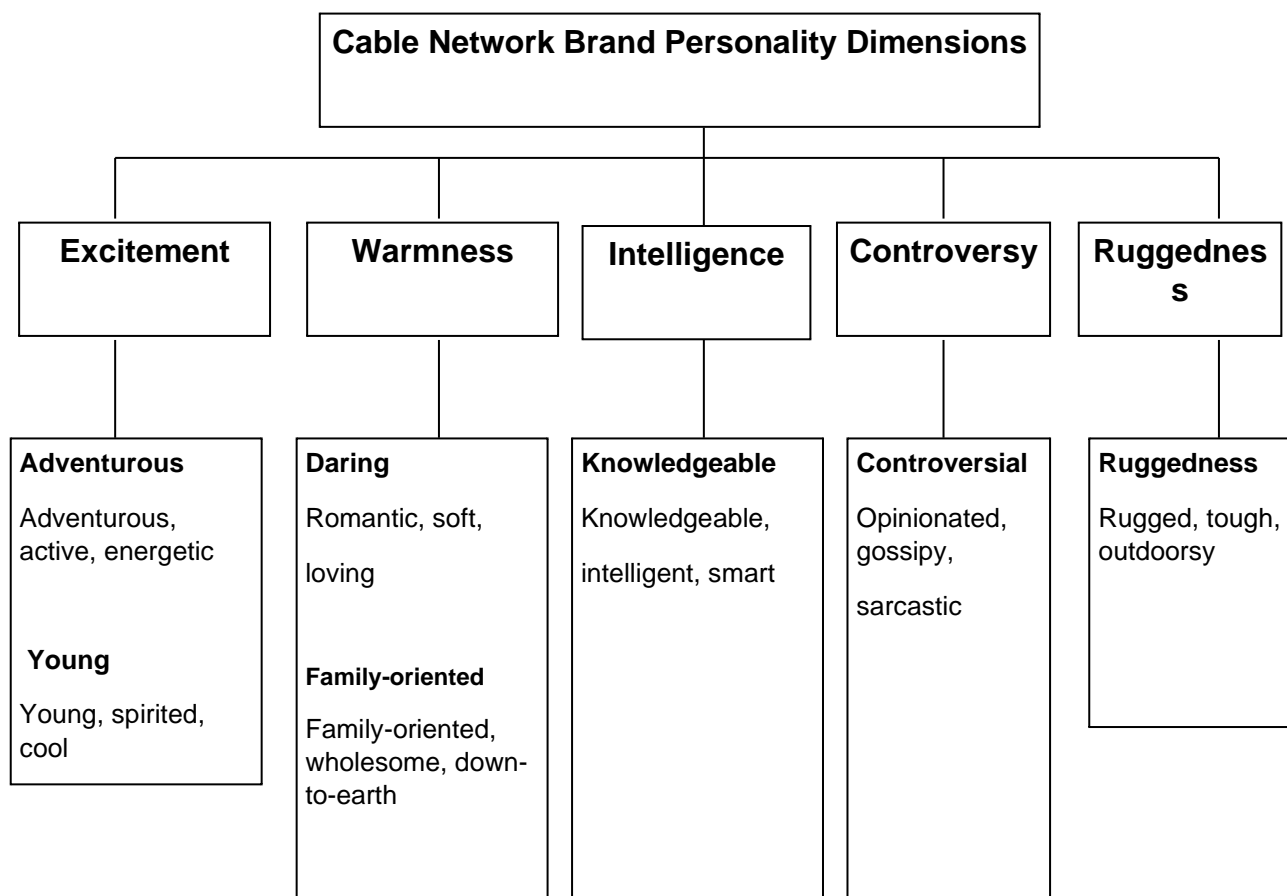
#### **4.3.4 Kim, Baek and Martin (2010) media brand personality dimensions**

Kim, Baek and Martin's (2010) empirical study-based brand personality modelling built on Chan-Olmsted and Cha's (2008) earlier scale and expanded the dimensions with input from the scales developed by Aaker (1997), and McDowell (2004). From an initial 229 traits, the number was reduced to 76 using online synonym finders on the meanings of all the initial traits generated. After various exploratory and confirmatory analyses, five dimensions were generated. They include trustworthiness, dynamism, sincerity, sophistication and toughness. Kim, Baek and Martin (2010) did not limit their

study to a particular media segment but conceptualised news media in its entirety. This was done to fill in the gap of building a brand personality model that could be applied across media outlets. By sampling 16 media brands in television and print, the selection categories were broadcast, cable news network, national newspapers, local newspapers and news magazines. Through their modelling, Kim, Baek and Martin (2010) attest that, though media audiences seek more from their preferred media outlets, they pay greater attention to outlets they can rely on for credible news. Meaning, media outlets with more journalistic orientation were preferred, as that signalled quality to media audiences sampled for this study. Their model related trustworthiness with credibility and indicates that, for most media outlets, this is considered the most necessary brand personality dimension (Kim, Baek & Martin 2010:128). Dynamism included constructs such as lively, energetic, edgy and imaginative. Similar to Aaker's (1997) excitement dimension, Kim, Baek and Martin (2010) suggested that their dynamism dimension related to a media outlet that appealed to younger demographics. They noted that this dimension is of utmost importance to younger audiences and depicted media outlets that appealed to the youth. Sincerity, according to them, considered traits like family-oriented, friendly and sentimentalism. This results from the news presentation styles of broadcasters, which gives the news media a friendly and sincere impression. Their sophistication dimension bears resemblance with that of Aaker (1997), acknowledging aesthetics and designs of magazines and newspapers. It represents glamour, charm, feminine, smooth and stylistic aspects of media personalities. Finally, toughness could also relate to Aaker's ruggedness. They conceived toughness to relate to the 'rough and tumble' conversations, as well as aggressive comments that sometimes happened in chat rooms and social media sites.

#### ***4.3.5 Sung and Park (2011) cable network brand personality dimensions***

Another brand personality building effort by Sung and Park (2011), similar to Chan-Olmsted and Cha (2008), was modelled for cable television network brands. The motive for this study, according to the researchers was that, beyond traditional television, brand personality could be modelled for online cable brands which are increasing daily. This is harmonious with what this study seeks to achieve in radio online brand extensions, in terms of the way they use their gatekeeping activities to define their brand personality as a distinguishing item from solely online radio brands without traditional media affiliation. Unlike Chan-Olmsted and Cha's (2008) brand personality dimensions, however, Sung and Park's (2011) model for network television was more greatly paralleled to that of Aaker (1997). It revealed that some cable networks presented personality dimensions with similar meanings as commercial products, as well as media-specific personalities. This brand personality modelling by Sung and Park (2011), unlike previous models which sought to examine how audiences perceived single networks, set to understand how audiences' minds perceived brand personality dimensions (Sung & Park 2011:95). The study sampled 36 popular cable networks based on a free-association task, where participants had to individually write the personality trait that came to mind when they thought of the randomly selected network brands. They conceptualised brand personality along the dimensions of excitement, warmth, intelligence, controversy and ruggedness.



**Figure 4.4: Cable network brand personality dimensions (Sung & Park 2011:100)**

Two of the dimensions, excitement and ruggedness are largely consistent with Aaker's (1997). Their excitement dimension, which signified brands that appealed to the younger sect of the population, was measured by adventurous and young. These items were found to be expressive of the active, exciting or energetic feelings and images of cable television programmes such as sports news. As well as the cool, spirited, young or spontaneous traits found in contemporary network contents, such as reality shows. Networks such as MTV and ESPN were found to largely exhibit this dimension. Their warmness dimension, which they relate to Aaker's (1997) sincerity

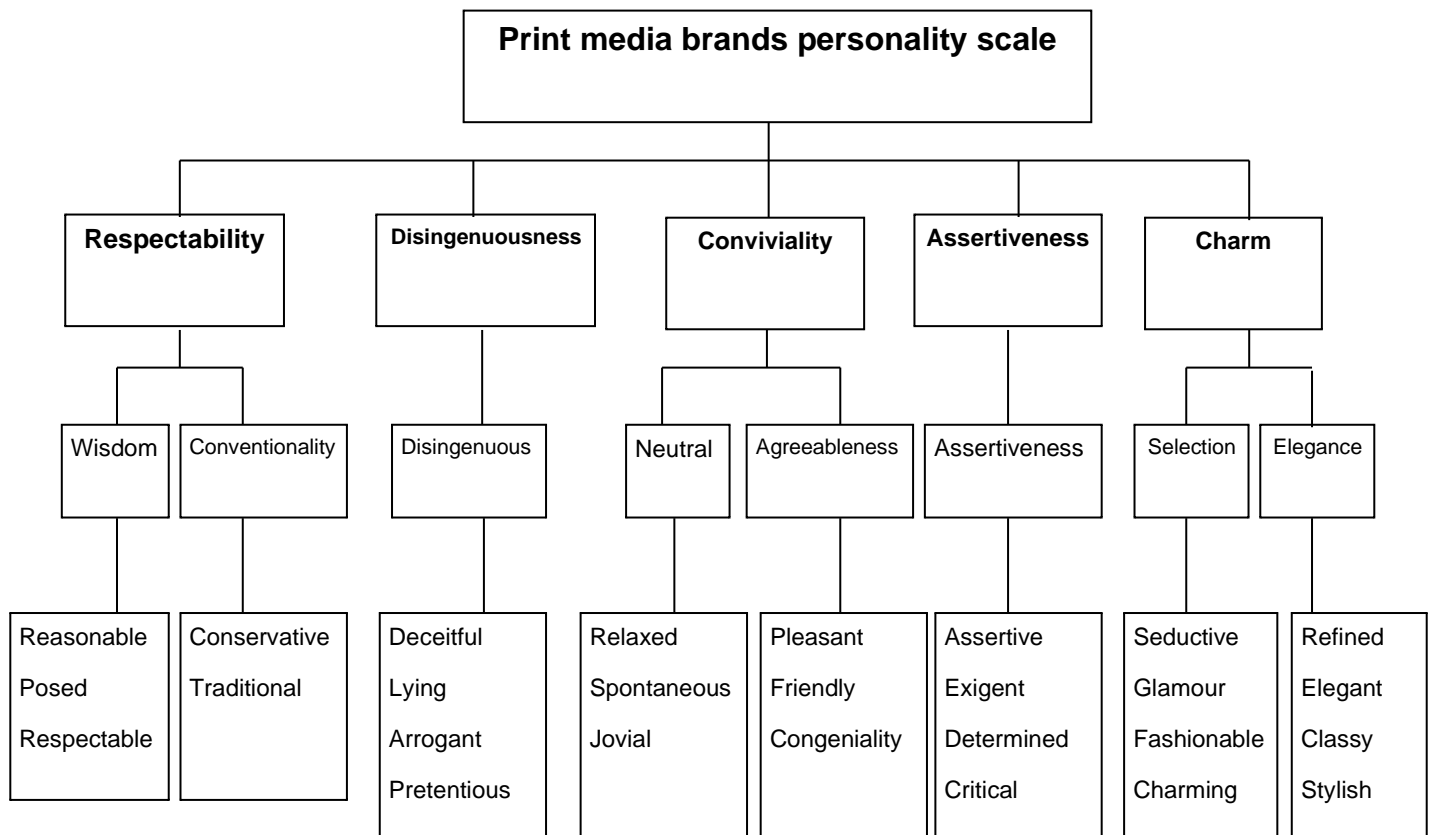


dimension, was, however, found to be measured by two unique items which are cable network-specific: romantic and family-oriented. Cable networks such as Hallmark Channel, TV Land and ABC Family were found to be in this category. Intelligence was attributed to the primary utilitarian function of cable television networks as sources of news and critical information. It was found to relate to Aaker's (1997) competence, but as Sung and Park (2011:101) assert, this personality trait is cable network-specific. It is measured on the facets knowledgeable, intelligent and smart. Cable channels within this dimension include HLC, the Weather Channel and the Travel Channel. Controversy, also conceived as a cable network-specific dimension, was explained by the views, opinions or political personalities presented by some cable networks. It is measured on the facets opinionated, gossipy and sarcastic, and was found to be analogous to cable networks such as E! Entertainment, MTV, MSNBC and CNN. This was found to be consistent with Bae's (2000) findings for MSNBC and CNN. Rugged, similar to Aaker's (1997) ruggedness, measured rugged, tough, masculine and outdoorsy content. It portrays the rugged personalities created in sports, outdoor activities or travel programmes prevalently available on channels such as ESPN, ESPN2, Travel Channel and Discovery Channel.

#### ***4.3.6 Valette-Florence and De Barnier (2013) print media brand personality scale***

In another study, Valette-Florence and De Barnier (2013) drew on "macro" measurements of brand personality with predictive validity to construct a "micro," categorical, cultural and contextual brand personality model for the French print media brand. In this study, 24 newspapers and magazines were sampled on the basis of

substantial circulation figures, pairs of relatively similar publications and publications belonging to the same category, but with different formats. From an initial 121 personality traits obtained from a qualitative process, a questionnaire was developed, focusing on these traits and those developed by Salerno (2001). However, unlike other brand personality scales that have the dimensions with their measurement items, this scale is a three-hierarchy model showing the brand personality dimensions, with first and second order factor structures. After principal component exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis, eight dimensions for dimension order one: wisdom, conventionality, disingenuousness, natural, agreeableness, assertiveness, seduction and elegance were generated. Thereafter, these were trimmed down. The five final and main dimensions were outlined for dimension order two and also served as the main dimensions generated: respectability, disingenuousness, conviviality, assertiveness and charm. Obviously, these brand personality dimensions had very little or no resemblance with that of Aaker's (1997) or the others studied. However, they were derived from empirical studies without theoretical implications. Unlike previous brand personality scales that are transposed from theories of human personality (Wee 2004), this model stems directly from brand inventories. The micro level analysis generated from the macro level ensured that both cultural and contingent specificities of the area of application (print media) are fully considered.



**Figure 4.5 Print media brand personality scale (Valette-Florence & De Barnier 2013:900)**

#### **4.3.7 Kumar and Venkatesakumar (2015) business-media brand personality scale**

Kumar and Venkatesakumar (2015:50) were of the view that business media has developed into one of the largest segments within media circles, calling for dedicated research attention. To bridge this gap, they developed a business media brand personality scale for business media brands across media sectors using a macro approach. They argued that scales that consider individual media sectors “have

become irrelevant due to convergence led by technology” (Kumar & Venkatesakumar 2015:50). Thus, the scale they developed could be applied to all media sectors. As emphasised by this study, media now project convergence, where media outlets now offer different media genres and products to meet the needs of different audience categories and segments. Additionally, this new brand personality focuses on the business aspect of media (following a marketing orientation), making this framework very relevant since most of the scales have not considered this.

Using a mixed method approach, Kumar & Venkatesakumar (2015) developed a scale which could be applied to all media sectors. The authority and elegance of the scale is based on the experiences of audiences through empirical study, rather than an imposition of previous brand personality dimensions. Initial exploratory analysis generated 168 items which were scaled down to 105 through a content analysis process. These 105 items were categorised by level of importance and after both Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analyses, the number of items were reduced to 39. A 14-dimension scale for business media brand personality was proposed as (with measurement items in bracket): widely analytical (analyses of issues, convergence of business strategy, importance to international perspective, coverage of business events, and provides financial and economic history); integrity (reliable, factual, quality of presentation, and veracity of information); richness (credibility of editors, articles by eminent economists and industry leaders, and graphical representation of data); sensitive (pedigree, interesting supplements, and leveraging technological convergence); young and vibrant (school rankings, fairs and exhibitions, and sales promotions); focused (sticking to core competence, and corporate focused); strategic (glossary of business terms, and separate segments to appeal to different sections of

readers); engaging (letters to editors, and quiz on current business); stature (interview with regulators, and personality of editor); decisive (seeks higher engagement with readers, aids decision makers, and pointing out mistakes of companies); responsive (reader feedback, and reader contributions); professional (business language, and business like language); discriminating (comfortable line spacing, and appeal to academia); and visionary (grammatically correct language, policy evaluation, and relate to unrelated).

#### ***4.3.8 Kim's (2017) unified media brand personality scale***

Last but not least, Kim (2017) proposed a three-personality dimensions model with the constructs – aggression, heroism and warmth to measure brand personality for movie, TV show, pop song, news, and video game brands. Called the 'unified media brand personality scale', the model sought to strike a middle ground between the macro and micro levels of inquiry, thus, making it appropriate for measuring media brand personality dimensions applicable to a wide variety of media. It sought to be media-content-specific, rather than the broader ones like Aaker's (1997), which are very general. Aside from its media specific characteristic, it was also conceptualised to be more versatile and broadly applicable than media category-specific brand personality scales. Though the selection of media brands and brand personality dimension items was said to be based on a free-association task, selection was also guided by which media and dimensions had been involved in related studies such as Valette-Florence and De Barnier (2013), Sung and Park (2011), and Kim, Baek and Martin (2010). In all, 47 personality traits were derived and tested.

The findings from Kim's (2017) study suggest that measurement of brand personality need not take place at strictly the macro or micro ends of a spectrum. This is particularly true when seeking to determine common dimensions between separate but related contexts, as is the case with media of various types. To that end, the meso-level examination is also a viable approach. Though Kim (2017) asserts that "the possibility of common dimensions in perception of media brands is also indirectly supported by the selective exposure literature, where central theories of media selection have been tested with a range of media formats (e.g., Knobloch-Westerwick & Alter 2006; Strizhakova & Krcmar 2007), the findings of his study in the form of dimensions were not consistent with the media categories sampled, questioning the basis of the theoretical foundations underpinning his study. For instance, aggression (dark, violent, hostile, ruthless, and aggressive) was considered as a positive characteristic in the context of video games, but not necessarily applicable in the case of pop music. Similarly, warmth, while a positive characteristic with music, was found not to be considered in the context of news. This challenges the 'unified' purpose of the brand personality scale since inherent contextual valences with regard to specific media categories differ.

In this modelling, the warmth and heroism dimensions were found to relate to the sincerity dimension in the studies by Kim, Baek and Martin (2010) and Aaker (1997), with items such as sentimental, romantic and loving for warmth, and honourable, helpful and responsible for heroism. The aggression dimension, measured by dark, aggressive, hostile, violent and ruthless, was also found to be consistent with the aggression dimension of Geuens, Weijters and de Wulf (2009).

**Table 4.1 Dimensions of the unified media brand personality scale (Kim 2017:211)**

<b>Aggression</b>	<b>Heroism</b>	<b>Warmth</b>
Dark	Honorable [ <i>sic</i> ]	Sentimental
Aggressive	Helpful	Romantic
Hostile	Responsible	Loving
Violent		
Ruthless		

#### **4.4 Summary of brand personality scales used in the media**

Aside from the model and dimensions by Valette-Florence and De Barnier (2013) for the French print media brand industry and that of Kumar and Venkatesakumar (2015), all the other models have similar dimensions. Table 4.2 below gives a summary of the various models, the dimensions, and the media sector applied.

**Table 4.2 Summary of brand personality scales used in the media**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Brand personality dimensions</b>	<b>Media segment applied</b>
1997	Aaker	Sincerity Excitement Competence Sophistication Ruggedness	Social media (Langstedt & Hunt 2017)  Radio (Kesse 2017)
2006	Chen & Rogers	Intelligent Fun Organised Candid Sincere	Website
2008	Chan-Olmsted & Cha	Competence Timeliness Dynamism	Television
2010	Kim, Baek & Martin	Trustworthiness Dynamism Sincerity Sophistication Toughness	The media in its entirety
2011	Sung and Park	Excitement Warmness Intelligence Controversy Ruggedness	Cable television network
2013	Valette-Florence & de Barnier	Respectability Disingenuousness Conviviality Assertiveness	French print media



		Charm	
2015	Kumar & Venkatesakumar	Widely analytical Integrity Richness Sensitive Young and vibrant Focused Strategic Engaging Stature Decisive Responsive Professional Discriminating Visionary	The media in its entirety
2017	Kim	Aggression Heroism Warmth	The media in its entirety

#### 4.5 News media gatekeeping: an essential dimension of brand personality

Dimensions of brand personality have been associated with human characteristics or traits, largely because of the definition. As evidenced in the previous section, various brand personality models and dimensions have been identified in the literature. However, a bird's-eye view reveals that many of the dimensions had significant relationships with each other. The dimension names or the measurement items have been found to be parallel, similar or slightly different from those used in previous scales, but only given different labels (Davies et al 2018:115; Kim 2018:204).

Despite this, the homogeneity of the brand personality dimensions and measurement items does not seem to be the most critical aspect of brand personality construction. What has really been at the centre of contention is the lack of theoretical foundations for the construct [of brand personality dimensions]; and the overly large number of dimensions being discovered (Ashton, Lee, Goldberg & de Vries 2009; Davies et al 2018:115; Musek 2007). This has been attributed to the fact that almost all brand personality dimensions have been derived empirically, rather than theoretically. Additionally, subsequent studies have not had dimensions emerging solely from their studies, but rather, they wholly or partially include previously identified dimensions. This has led to the lack of universality in the conclusions on brand personality modelling (Davis et al 2018:120). Ideally, scale development should be informed by a theoretical understanding of what is to be measured (Churchill 1979) to ensure that the measurement items indeed measure the desired dimension. This is the proof of reliability and validity advanced by quantitative researchers. For example, Aaker's (1997) generic brand personality modelling and dimensions, which has gained credibility, emerged from a rigorously tested and multidimensional measure factor analysis of survey data from the public in the United States of America, rather than any theoretical underpinnings.

Most of these studies of brand personality scale development have been based on a transposition of theories of human personality to the area of brands and the use of "crude" measurement tools, which were originally developed for human personality (Wee 2004). This has led to a situation where, while some human personality

characteristics are found in brand personalities, others are not applicable at all and as such are not used for dimension building (Valette-Florence & De Barnier 2013:898). Admittedly, Aaker (1997) attested that it was necessary to develop brand personality scales that could be contextually adapted to the category of the product being used since not all human personality scales were systematically applicable.

The lack of a theoretical underpinning was found to be the cause of some cultural- and contextual-specific dimensions being unfit in some contexts (Davies et al 2018). After Aaker's (1997) original study, a subsequent study conducted in Japan by Aaker, Banet-Martinez & Garolera (2001), using the same brand personality dimensions discovered in the United States, revealed that ruggedness, which was a culturally fit dimension in America, was not culturally fit in Japan. This is because of the general peacefulness in Japan. In another study in Spain, only three of the dimensions were consistent with the United States of America (sincerity, excitement and sophistication), with competence and ruggedness being unfit because Spain is labelled as 'passion and peaceful' (Aaker et al 2001). Other empirical studies followed suit in replicating the studies to find the contextual commonalities between Aaker's (1997) and other brand personality dimensions in other cultures (see Muniz & Marcgettum 2012; Sung & Tinkham 2005). Various studies like that of Caprara, Barbaranelli and Guido (2001) also confirmed that human personality scale could not be directly transposed to brands. In a neural magnetic resonance imaging study (Yoon, Gutchess, Feinberg & Polk 2006), disparities in the sections of processing and the manner in which the human brain processed and interpreted human personality and brand personality data varied, thus, leading the researchers to challenge the basis for human characteristics to be used to describe brands. They confirmed that their results "challenge the view

that processing of products and brands is akin to that of humans” (Yoon, Gutchess, Feinberg & Polk 2006:31).

This thesis, much like Davies et al (2018:115), suggests that human personality dimensions in the form of human characteristics do not offer a convincing theoretical basis for brand personality modelling in an arena like digital media. Here, traditional media is prominently represented and much has not changed regarding their normative gatekeeping activities. Also, it has been observed that the quality they have continually worked at, through their careful gatekeeping practices in the static era has become a ‘brand heritage’ (Tungate 2005), earning them credibility, and acceptance by media audiences, even in the new media terrain.

For a coherent, generic, across-context and cross-cultural acceptance of brand personality in the media, this thesis assents to the proposition that “certain theoretically derived and empirically supported dimensions should be seen as relevant to brand personality, irrespective of context and the choice of measurement items” (Austin, Sigauw & Mattilla 2003; and see also Berens & van Riel 2004; Davies et al 2018:116). Davies et al (2018) have, for instance, proposed Signalling Theory (Connelly, Certo, Ireland & Reutzel 2011; Spence 1973), which, according to them, is independent of brand personality constructs and dimensions. They argue it can serve as an umbrella theory under which all brand personality dimensions should be theorised. They advanced that, instead of the human personality theory, signalling theory “explains how companies come to edit and shape their communication and to signal only specific aspects of a brand, because they find they work for them in the marketplace”

(Connelly, Certo, Ireland & Reutzel 2011; and see also Spence 1973). They are, however, of the view that, when used alone, Signalling Theory does not define which signals are most relevant to brands, informing the addition of the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick 2007; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick & Xu 2002). This model singles out warmth/sincerity, competence and status as basic characteristics of humans which have been extended as brand personality dimensions to corporate and brand imagery (Aaker Vohs & Mogilner 2010; Cuddy et al 2009; Kervyn, Fiske & Malone 2012).

The three dimensions of warmth/sincerity, competence and status, as well as other dimensions, can be used in media modelling. As discussed in Chapter Three, gatekeeping and the decision-making that goes with it, are also a means that media outlets signal how they want their audiences and the society at large to identify them. Whatever media outlets perceive to be their strength is where they sound the signal to media audiences by channelling greater effort for the much-desired attention. A signal has been defined as “an action that the seller can take to convey information credibly about any unobservable product quality to the buyer” (Rao, Qu, Ruekert 1999:259). It has further been explained that brand personality dimensions serve as important signals for both customers and employees of a business entity, who can “use them in constructing or maintaining their own self-image and in promoting that to others,” (Davies et al 2018:122).

Gatekeeping in the media has been rightly theorised and empirically studied from White’s (1950) seminal study till today. Even changes in the media landscape due to

technological innovations have been accounted for in contemporary and digital gatekeeping theories. Aside from that, empirical studies have been conducted to test the validity of various media gatekeeping theories propounded over the years. Furthermore, Chapter Three has helped to ascertain why news media gatekeeping can be used as a media branding feature to affect media positioning decisions. Having analysed gatekeeping from these perspectives, it can then be argued that gatekeeping is a signalling feature by media outlets, whether traditional or digital, because it discloses what they stand for. Its study can then be done, aside from the various perspectives studied from the media already, using the Signalling Theory, thus, confirming the assertion made by Davies et al (2018).

In the media fraternity, while traditional media have not been able to effectively counter the external pressures from technological changes and the new media landscape, the steadfast amalgamation of their gatekeeping practices and the ability to hold on to it from the static traditional media forms onto the digital platform has proven to be the essential lifeline to their survival. This makes audiences patronise their news outlets, not as mere sources of information, but as a lifestyle (Tungate 2005). Based on the preceding substantiation, this study proposes gatekeeping, which is fundamental to media work and forms the sum total or embodiment of branding by media outlets, as an important brand personality dimension. This is because, it determines the type of personality or identity communicated to audiences and, in turn, how audiences will perceive the media outlet. Gatekeeping is accepted across cultures and contexts, and its theorisation has metamorphosed from the static gatekeeping theories into the digital theories to take care of any innovations that technology presents the media industry overtime. It has been argued that, decision making is strongly driven by brand

identity (Aaker 1996), and in media circles, the brand identity projected is dependent on the gatekeeping decisions undertaken. This study advances the acknowledgement of news media gatekeeping as a brand personality construct, to be measured on the commercialisation and journalistic facets.

#### **4.6 Summary**

This chapter discussed the concept of brand personality from the perspectives of consumer product marketing and the media, surveying a number of models used in media brand literature. It was evident from the various brand personality models studied that brand personality dimensions were essentially human traits and characteristics attributed to various products based on how consumers and, in this sense, media audiences viewed a media brand. Additionally, all these models have been developed through empirical studies and later models have wholly or partially depended on previous models for traits, facets and dimensions, without strong theoretical underpinnings.

The chapter argued that human characteristics alone provide inadequate theoretical underpinnings for brand personality building but that theoretically driven and empirically supported dimensions also need to be considered. Based on this, the chapter proposed that gatekeeping decisions and activities define how a media brand wants to be perceived and how their audiences also perceive them. Thus, it served as a signal, and so, as proposed by Davies et al (2018), and similar to other brand personality dimensions, gatekeeping which is theoretically driven and empirically

tested can be a brand personality dimension under the Signalling Theory (Connelly, Certo, Ireland & Reutzel 2011; Spence 1973).



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

News outlets often indicate the kind of personality and identity they wish to portray to society and their audiences through their decision making in the newsroom. These are observed in the balance between journalistic and market orientation (Siegert et al 2011). This subsequently influences the detailed decisions taken, such as the target audience to reach; the types of news stories to select, publish and follow up; and language choice and writing style in journalistic content production. These decisions and choices sum up the gatekeeping undertaken by the media outlet and also signal what the media outlet stands for to society and media audiences. As discussed in the preceding chapter, the overall framework that envelops actions that marketers use to convey information credibly about the quality of their products to their intended buyers (Rao, Qu, Ruekert 1999:259) is the Signalling Theory. This will serve as the main theoretical framework underpinning this study. Though originally applied in economics, and subsequently in human resource and anthropology, the application of signalling theory in this study will enlighten researchers in the field of media studies to consider its relevance in media brand personality building.

The chapter further discusses gatekeeping theory as theorised over the years by various researchers. The evolution of gatekeeping theory is largely attributed to technological advancement and the internet, which has caused changes in the news creation and diffusion process. Not only have these changes impacted society in terms of who guards the gates of what information society receives, it also has pressing implications for gatekeeping research. The relevance of gatekeeping theory

as an analytic framework in the digital age has been contested (Shoemaker & Vos 2009; Vos & Heinderyckx 2015), largely because of the ease of creation and diffusion of news stories. This notwithstanding, professional news creation and diffusion has always been a preserve for professional gatekeepers. The conceptualisation of gatekeeping to mean whoever makes decisions in news creation and diffusion has not changed from White's (1950) simple 'in' and 'out' media gatekeeping theory, which has evolved into complex network theories to make up for industry changes.

This chapter examines the evolution of gatekeeping theory, addressing how various gatekeeping theories have projected routine gatekeeping roles and functions of traditional news media outlets. It also addresses the inadequacies of various gatekeeping theories in addressing the innovations brought in the wake of technological advancement, hence, a call for newer theories and models. This is essential in this digital era, where media audiences and other new media technologies are competing with traditional news channels as news sources. While traditional media has converged with new media to stand up to the challenge. This theoretical analysis correlates with the first research objective and question posed in Chapter One. It seeks to explore the adequacy of traditional and current gatekeeping theories in projecting the gatekeeping functions and roles of traditional media, especially radio, to distinguish it from the flood of news sources.

Finally, by amalgamating factors from Signalling Theory (Spence 1973) and gatekeeping theory, a conceptual framework is developed for application in data collection and analysis. This will help identify the brand personality of the sampled news outlets and which can also be applied to other news outlets outside this study.

## **5.2 Key concepts in the signalling environment**

Within the signalling environment and timeline, there are four elements: the signaller or trustee (sender); the signal or information; the receiver or truster; and the feedback (Connelly et al 2011). The next subsections discuss these key concepts in detail.

### **5.2.1 *The signaller***

The signaller, also called the trustee, could be a product, person or firm with an underlying quality which needs to be communicated to the receiver. All media outlets, no matter the category or segment of audiences they target, can be considered signallers. Every signaller has an obligation to send an honest and trustworthy signal to the receiver or truster. It has been observed that trustees with low discount factor have no incentive to be trustworthy to the truster since the probability of future meetings or engagement is unlikely (Przepiorka & Berger 2017). Przepiorka and Diekmann (2013), in an experimental test of a game theoretic model on the trustworthiness of signals in the United Kingdom, Russia and Switzerland, concluded that every trustee has an incentive to be trustworthy from the first contact in meeting the needs of the truster or receiver. When this fails, regardless of the discount factor of the trustee, he may lose the benefits of all future exchanges, including loyalty and recommendations.

### **5.2.2 *The signal***

Signalling theory is primarily about the deliberate communication of positive information about a firm, product or person, aimed at conveying positive attributes about it. Though signals could be channelled within usual activities, such as news media gatekeeping which is a routine activity undertaken and so may not have any strategic production (Przepiorka & Berger 2017), it is expected to have a strategic effect on the receiver. Signal production is intended to be type-separating by distinguishing one outlet from another. A signal is said to be type-separating if “the true bearer of the relevant properties can afford to produce the signal and produces it while someone not equipped with these properties cannot afford to produce the signal” (Przepiorka & Berger 2017:383). Chapter Two discussed the way traditional media gatekeepers have been considered gatekeepers among gatekeepers because most often, they have the ability to gather their own news and take it through the gatekeeping process to refine it into the news they desire. For media audiences and some solely online news media outlets that do not have the capacity to gather their own news, they depend on traditional news outlets for news stories. In such a situation, though each media outlet serves a signal to its audiences by the news and information they send out, re-echoing or forwarding information from another news outlet adds to the credibility of the original gatekeeper, as it shows an endorsement by other competing gatekeepers.

Most signalling is done in a competitive environment and because there could be other signallers sending similar signals to the same target, the efficacy of the signal is dependent on the strength of the signal and the absence of ambiguity in the information conveyed by the signal. The effectiveness of a signal could hinge on 'signal observability' and the signal cost (Connelly et al 2011). Signal observability is the ability of receivers or outsiders to notice a signal. This is enhanced by sending more observable signals or increasing the number or frequency of signals (Janney & Folta 2003). For traditional media outlets with digital platforms, various media categories are used correlatedly, where programmes on digital platforms can be advertised on the traditional format a number of times and vice-versa to ensure that sufficient publicity is made. For digital media outlets without traditional media affiliation, they pin their hopes online on the digital platform. If a possible target fails to visit the digital platform, then the signal may be lost. This is confirmed by Heil and Robertson (1991), who affirm that the effectual strength of a firm's signal may be influenced by historical signals, as newer firms or outlets earn reputation from prior signals.

All signals are produced at a cost. The signal cost is the cost associated with acquiring, implementing or maintaining a signal, as well as penalties resulting from false signalling (Connelly et al 2011). There could be fixed production costs and variable costs based on the feedback received from receivers. For productive signals, the cost is assumed to be lower than that of an unproductive signal because, although the cost of producing the signal may be fixed, the signal failed to yield the intended or desired results of purchase or time spent listening by audiences (Przepiorka & Berger 2017), lowering or taking away the expected income. The difference between signalling costs being sufficient or necessary to a signaller is not as important as the net benefits to be

bagged after sending out the signal (Gambetta 2009; Johnstone 1997). Sometimes considered the “theory of costly signalling” (Bird & Smith 2005) because of its centrality to signal production effectiveness, it has been observed that some signallers are better placed than other signallers in absorbing the associated costs of signals. However, these costs and the regulatory environment ensure checks and balances to protect the truster in the signalling environment.

### **5.2.3 The receiver**

The receiver or the truster is the one who observes and interprets the signal from a trustee and chooses the preferred person, product or firm based on the quality signal received. Receivers are often outsiders who may not be privy to information about a product or firm. As such, they only act based on the information provided by the signaller. A reliable signal is dependent on the honesty of the signaller and the fitness of the signal. Bird and Smith (2005) have observed that signallers and receivers have conflicting interests to the extent that if a signaller is successful in deceiving a receiver about the quality promise, the signaller is advantaged and the receiver is disadvantaged. However, this could only be temporary, or where there is no desire for future engagements. If the receiver takes action that benefits the signaller based on the signal received, signalling is said to have been effective.

### **5.2.4. The feedback**

A feedback is the response sent to the signaller in the form of a positive response, such as purchases, time spent listening or watching. Feedback provided by the truster

is often dependent on the meaning they give to the signal sent by the trustee. Feedback could be positive or negative. Positive feedback is achieved when the feedback received from a truster meets the expectations of the trustee, which make audiences listen, watch or log onto a media outlet. In most instances, audiences make their presence felt by leaving a comment, tweeting or calling into live programmes to indicate their presence. A negative response, on the other hand, is received when there is poor signal fit (Connelly et al 2011:53). That is, when the signal is poorly correlated with quality promise and trusters show their discontentment or regret for responding to the signal. Negative feedback can also be achieved when the audiences miss the signal and so there is no engagement between truster and trustee.

### **5.3 Signalling as a theoretical and analytical framework**

With the ever-increasing number of news media outlets and the intense competition to attract media audiences, brought in the wake of the development of the internet and technological advancements, functional media attributes such as news content have failed to attract the attention of audiences (Aris & Bughin 2005; Kim, Baek & Martin 2010:117). This has called for other reliable alternatives such as audience interactivity and brand personality. Brand personality has been observed to be a product of the gatekeeping strategy adopted by media outlets, with audiences made aware of the brand personality adopted by an outlet through the way it positions itself in the market. A media outlet makes itself known to media audiences by sending signals about what it stands for. Audiences then decode these signals as brand personality, giving room for positive feedback. These signals are studied using signalling theory (Spence 1973). A signal is a cue that conveys information credibly about unobservable quality

to the receiver (i.e. an audience) (Rao, Qu & Ruekert 1999). It has been argued that the “evolutionary, economic and social theories about communication and status can be unified within the single theoretical framework: signalling theory” (Bird & Smith 2005:221).

Signalling theory deals with a fundamental dilemma of communication. This is, how a receiver or truster can establish whether or not the signaller or trustee is conveying the right information about an event or state of affairs that the signaller might have an interest to misrepresent. On the other hand, signalling theory is also concerned with the way the signaller or trustee can persuade the receiver or truster about the truth or otherwise of the claims being made. In all these, it is obvious that the signaller is in a better position to know the truth than the receiver, until the receiver experiences or uses the product offered by the signaller. For brand extensions of traditional media, the quality of the parent brand is often bestowed on the brand extension like the online media outlet, even before the truster experiences it. This reduces the uncertainty entertained by audiences in trying a product for the first time.

For digital brands without traditional media affiliation, the only known quality will be the one to be experienced once the audiences are logged onto it. Due to its versatility, signalling theory, though quite new to media studies, has been used in a number of other fields such as economics (Spence 1973), corporate governance (Zhang & Wiersema 2009), anthropology (Bird & Smith 2005), marketing (Heil & Robertson 1991), management (Connelly et al 2011), advertising (Nelson 1974) and biology.



These are well considered in addition to its rigorous and systematic framework for combining various convergent ideas about status competition (Bird & Smith 2005).

The focal point of signalling theory is primarily on the deliberate actions undertaken by signallers to intentionally communicate positive information about a firm or its products. This is done in an effort to convey positive attributes to the receiver to obtain favourable feedback from the receiver (Connelly et al 2011:44-45). The fundamental conviction on which signalling theory thrives is the assumption that the quality of products or services differ from organisations, and it is the distinguishing characteristic that purchasers look for. Though quality is subjective, it can be defined as “the underlying, unobservable ability of the signaller to fulfil the needs or demands of an outsider observing the signal” (Connelly et al 2011:39). Everyone who looks for a signal has needs they wish to be met by a signaller. Much like the market of lemons (Akerlof 1970), where information asymmetry exists in the market, the basic postulation of signalling theory is to reduce the information asymmetry between two parties, especially in a highly competitive market environment (Spence 1973). Where information asymmetry exists, signalling theory suggests that the interacting parties send signals in the form of messages to one another. This is done in order to adjust their purchasing behaviours accordingly (Spence 1973). Similar to the theory of preferred readings, which is situated within the field of Cultural Studies, Hall (1980) argues:

Before this message [put forward by signalers or trustees] can have an ‘effect’ (however defined), satisfy a ‘need’ or be put to a ‘use’, it must first be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded [by trusters]. It is this set of decoded meanings which ‘have an effect’, influence, entertain, instruct or persuade, with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioural consequences. (Hall 1980:119)

Signalling theory has been related to trust and argued to answer two main questions: (1) “How can an actor know that another actor can be trusted?”; and (2) “How can an actor convince another actor of his or her trustworthiness?” (Przepiorka & Berger 2017:375). The signaller or trustee first chooses whether and how to communicate information (signal) and the receiver or truster chooses how to interpret the signal (Connelly et al 2011). Coleman (1990) in his book *Foundations of social theory*, explains five important conditions to be met for sequential exchanges to happen between the signaler (trustee) and receiver (truster). These, as summarised by Przepiorka & Berger (2017:375) are: (1) the exchange is not based on a formally binding agreement; (2) a self-regarding trustee has no incentive to meet the truster’s advance; (3) the truster regrets having made an advance if it remains unmet by the trustee; (4) both truster and trustee are better off if the trustee meets the truster’s advance than if no exchange takes place; and (5) the truster is uncertain of whether his or her advance will be met by the trustee.

From a media perspective, the relationship that exists between a media outlet and its audiences is not based on any formal or binding agreement, but audiences choose to listen, watch or visit based on the congruence of the media brand’s personality with theirs, thus, meeting the first condition above. The second and third conditions are significant to differentiate between a market-oriented and journalistic-oriented media outlet, if the balance is not dealt with adequately. A self-regarding media outlet is always moved by what it will gain, rather than considering how beneficial its programming will be to its audiences. Media outlets that are market-oriented always

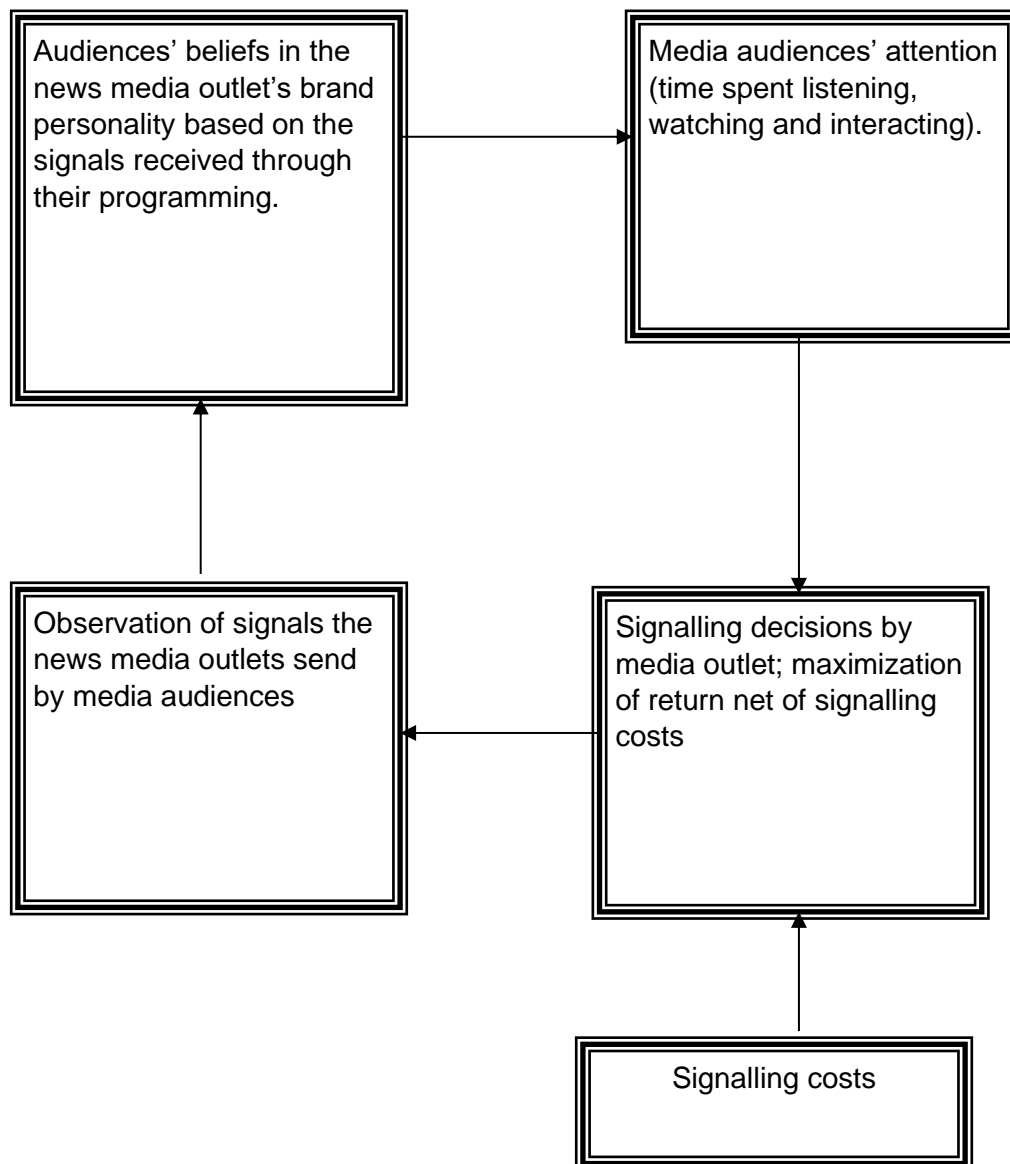
consider the profit and advantages to be achieved, rather than the information needs of audiences, which is championed by journalistic-oriented media outlets. Whereas media outlets need to survive on the monetary benefits from their commercial production, such as advertisements, it is expedient to balance this with the right content for audiences to benefit as well. When media audiences spend time listening, reading or watching a media outlet, they often have expectations. The ability of the media outlet to meet these expectations in their programming translates into audiences giving positive feedback to them in the form of frequent listening. This then translates into loyalty, leading to recommendations to family and friends. When the expectations are not met, it translates into regret without future listening.

The fourth condition holds that both truster and trustee are better off if the trustee meets the truster's advance rather than if no exchange takes place. If the media outlet (trustee) is able to meet the information needs or expectations of their audiences, it stands as an advantage to them. The truster may then consider them in the future, having known what they stand for. However, if nothing happens at all, then the truster may not know what they stand for and they may lose any future recommendations. Finally, the condition of 'market of lemons' (Akerlof 1970), where the truster is uncertain of whether their advance will be met by the trustee. Media audiences have information needs and that builds up to expectations of media outlets to meet those needs with each programme they patronise. While media outlets make quality promises (Siegert 2015:357) with each programme they communicate to audiences, the experience nature of media content (Chang & Chan-Olmsted 2010:641; Siegert 2015:356), especially of broadcast, puts audiences in suspense of whether the programme will meet their expectations. The actual quality of programming is what

media outlets deliver (Siegert 2015). When the media outlet is able to meet the quality promise made to audiences, through the way it puts together its programming, by selecting important issues, framing issues suitably, giving the right context (Siegert 2015:357), and through the detailed gatekeeping decisions undertaken, that is when audiences judge quality promise against quality delivery and expectations against experience.

#### **5.4 Information feedback in the signalling environment**

Spence's (1973) seminal study in economics basically examined the job market, where potential employees were observed to indicate or signal their suitability for various jobs by their educational qualification. Potential employers, though uncertain about the productivity of their potential employees, understood the academic credentials as signals of productivity and employ people based on that. Though the contexts and environments within which employment takes place differ significantly from what pertains among the media fraternity, the key concepts apply in every signalling environment. Figure 5.1 illustrates the information feedback loop for a media signalling environment designed by the author, based on an adaption of Spence's (1973:359) informational feedback in the job market.



**Figure 5.1: Informational feedback in signalling**  
 Source: author (2020), adapted from Spence (1973:359)

### 5.5 News media gatekeeping

Gatekeeping theory, which is the second theoretical framework underpinning this study, can be theorised to mean every process of transforming information and events through a series of journalistic 'gates' to get it into news (Shoemaker & Vos 2009).

Gatekeeping as a theory serves to appreciate how gatekeepers, who control specific gates, make choices and how much influence they have on news that reaches their audiences, setting the media agenda. News selection, which was central to White's (1950) seminal study, only constitutes one aspect of the gatekeeping process. Gatekeeping starts with news reporters who cover news stories and decide what to add and to withhold in a story before submission to the news editors for review and subsequent processing.

The gatekeeping process, which involves more than news selection, could then be defined in this study by adapting the writing from various scholars to include decisions about message encoding such as "selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating, and otherwise massaging information to become news" (Donohue, Tichenor & Olien 1972:43; and see also Shoemaker, Johnson, Seo & Wang 2010; Shoemaker, Vos & Reese 2008:124). This definition suggests that news is what gatekeepers say it is, and reflects "the overall process through which the social reality transmitted by the news media is constructed or shaped" (Shoemaker et al. 2001:233).

The media industry is one that has significantly been evolutionary, largely because of technological advancements and the internet. However, though old as the industry itself, the theoretical implications of gatekeeping as one important theory has equally evolved to meet the innovations of the technological age. The evolution has been attributed to the fact that contemporary theories are inadequate to cover the innovations that technology carries. This has been the basis for the new gatekeeping theories, though the concept remains the same as established by White's (1950)

seminal study. The following sections delve into gatekeeping theorisation over the years by various researchers, from the static and contemporary to digital theories. It emphasises conditions that ushered in the various theories, and the concerns of inadequacy that propelled the need for alternative and advanced gatekeeping theories.

### ***5.5.1 Lewin's conception of gatekeeping model***

The social-psychologist, Lewin (1947), is credited with coining the term “gatekeeper” around World War II. His ground-breaking field theory used gatekeeping as a means to persuade people to make careful food consumption decisions around the period of the war, when food supply was short. Lewin (1947) studied the process by which food got from the grocery store or garden to the family table. In the process, he discovered a series of channels with “sections” and “gates” which were “governed by either impartial rules or by ‘gatekeepers’” (Lewin 1947:145). It was them, who made decisions on what to allow and what not to allow. Through their decisions, they imparted different levels of influence on the final outcome. The gatekeepers represented individuals or groups of people who held various levels of influence over which food items passed the gates. The ‘impartial rules’, on the other hand, represented non-human environmental conditions that influenced the process, which included time or space for procuring and transporting the food. The theory included the concept of ‘forces’, which determined whether items would pass through a gate. Lewin (1947) demonstrated the complex environment and multivariate structural factors within which the gatekeeping process thrives. Lewin (1947) submitted that, prior to the food consumption decisions of families, multiple environmental factors also contribute to the systematic process, the development of eating habits and food

consumption behaviour in its entirety. Lewin's (1947) field theory, as conceptualised in the model portrayed in Figure 5.2 below, has been used in other related fields such as communication.

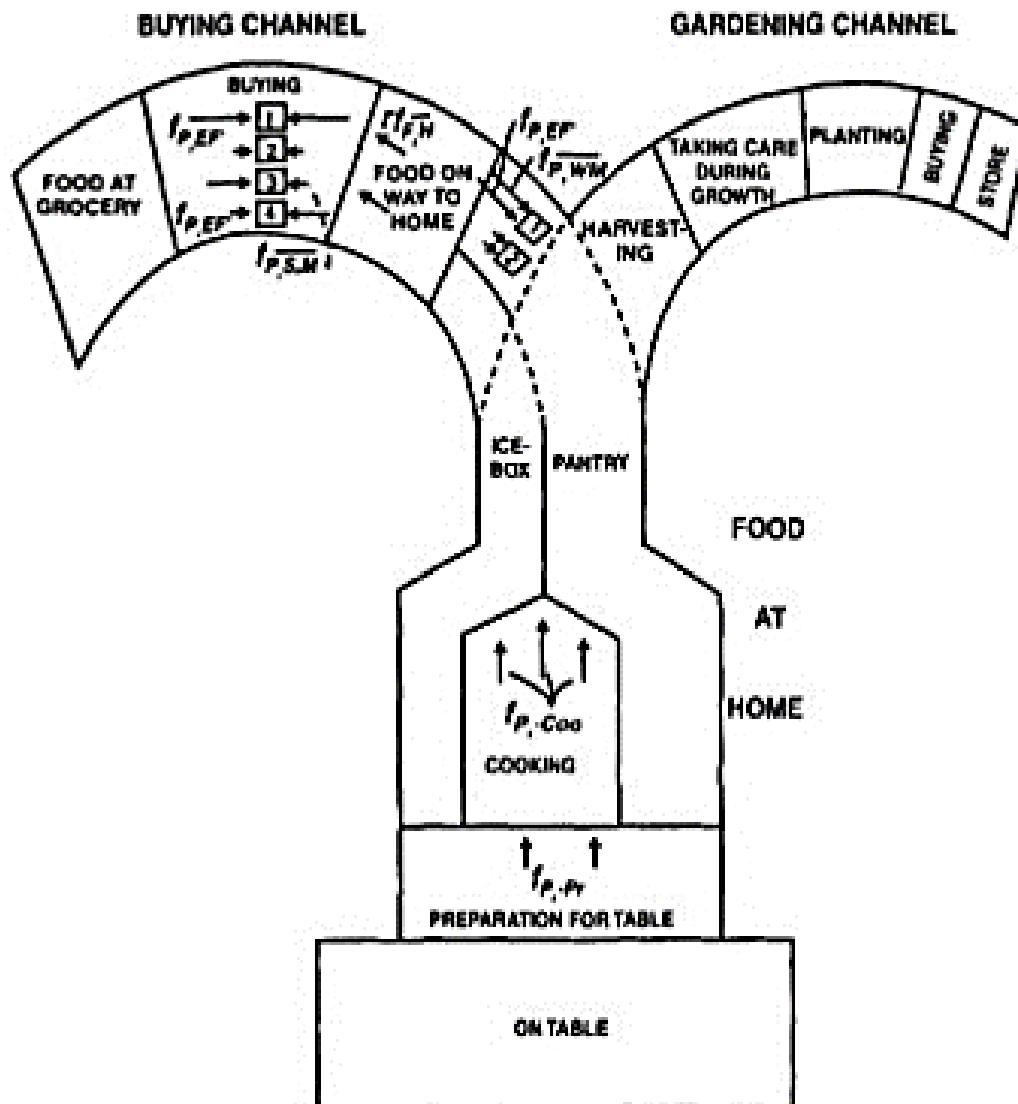


Figure 5.2 Psychological ecology (Lewin 1947:149)

A major contribution by Kurt Lewin to gatekeeping theory was that the complete field theory served as a holistic framework for understanding the gatekeeping concept. His theory formed the conceptual framework projecting the complex multivariate factors that collectively influence the content of the media, if taken within the media perspective. In the context of brand personality and news diffusion, the multi-channel

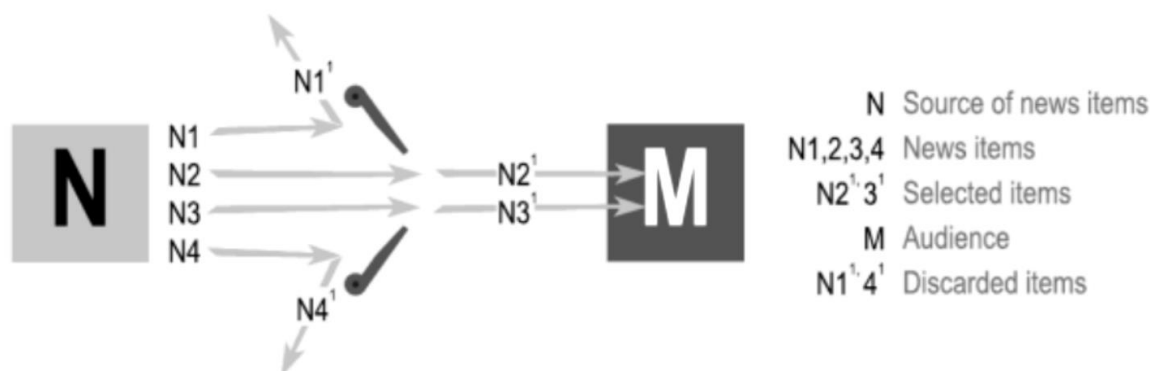


concept illustrates the distinct but interdependent roles and influences of journalists. Starting from news gathering through production and publication and portrayal of what the media outlets stands for, and how audiences buy into their personality profile to inform others to benefit from it too.

### **5.5.2 White's (1950) gatekeeping model**

The concept of gatekeeping, as applied in field theory, could be applied to other contexts as well. This includes “the travelling of a news item through certain communication channels” (Lewin 1951), as well as influences on the flow of information within a group (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). This could have been the motivation for White's (1950) application of the gatekeeping concept into his seminal media gatekeeping study on the wire news editor, whom he called “Mr. Gates”. This marked the trail-blazing of gatekeeping research in the media. Mr. Gates determined what became and what did not become news, from the thousands of news stories he received. Though oversimplified, White's bivariate construction of the process has been described as a “classic study” which “capture[s] the imagination” (Reese & Ballinger 2001:642) of gatekeeping into reality. His framework depicts the unidirectional news dissemination process. White's study reduced the entire news and gatekeeping process to the “highly subjective” (White 1950:386) “in” and “out” preferential and perceptive judgement of news content that determined selection of news information by the wire news editor. By his representation, he undermined Lewin's (1947) social system within field theory, with the associated influencers (Shoemaker & Vos 2009). His concentration on Mr. Gates overemphasised the editor's position as the most important gatekeeper, not giving credence to the environment

within which he worked and the other actors that influenced the news making process, such as news reporters.



**Figure 5.3 White's (1950) gatekeeping model**

Source: McQuail and Windahl (1981:100)

White's conceptual model, as illustrated in Figure 5.3, shows the simplified gatekeeping process where there is a news source (N), denoting the news stories available to the editor for channeling to the audiences (M). The stories that got selected, N2 and N3 were made available to the audience, while news stories N1 and N4, which were not selected, were discarded. The gatekeeper is portrayed here to have a great influence on the stories that set the media agenda.

However simplified, White's (1950) greatest contribution to the development of gatekeeping theory was the way he gave meaning to the gatekeeping concept and paved the way for theoretical research in that regard. Reese and Ballinger (2001:647) attest that "by identifying gatekeepers, White brought into focus the intuitive notion that not all that happens in the world gets into the news," acknowledging that news is what gatekeepers say it is. Gatekeeping, in White's (1950) pre-internet era, was solely the

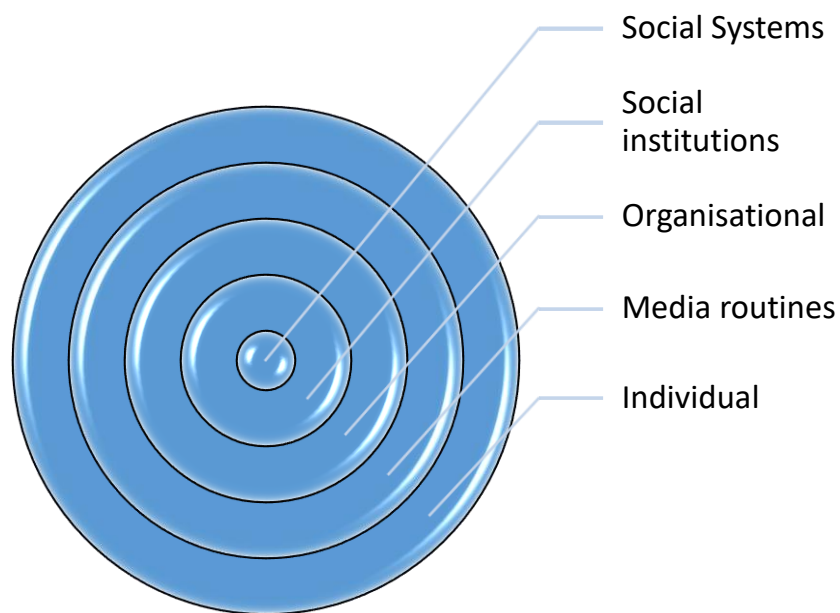
responsibility of professional journalists who worked in the traditional media, thus, indicating that they set the media agenda by their individual and collective decisions or the applications of rules.

Having studied White's (1950) methodology and concepts, it has been critiqued that White's focus on the news editor portrays the editor's role in deciding what information appears for publication, limiting the influence of the environment within which he operates. He portrays the editor as so important, without considering the gatekeeping roles that happen before the editor's role. For example, those performed by reporters and news writers. Bass (1969:72), as well as Shoemaker and Vos (2009), identify two discrete roles in journalistic gatekeeping. The first is performed by "newsgatherers" who find and amalgamate information into news items. The second is by "news processors" who transform the raw news on events into the complete news product for publication. Consequently, journalistic gatekeeping involves more than just the editor or his role, and decision making is not a one-off event but happens at different stages. Brown (1979:595) argues that "From the point at which David Manning White transposed Kurt Lewin's gatekeeper concept to communications situations, elements of the original concept have been ignored or interpreted in a manner that renders some of the findings questionable." From this backdrop, it was suggested that news gatekeeping could better be understood by considering the whole news environment and process from information gathering, thus, making it available to audiences, comparable to Lewin's (1947) field theory (Brown 1979; Shoemaker 1991). Shoemaker (1991), thus, revisited Lewin's original concept which is broader and acknowledges the interplay of multivariate influential factors within a social environment to develop the hierarchy of influence model where she identified five

levels of influence within the media framework. The next section discusses the hierarchy of influences models by Shoemaker and her colleague.

### ***5.5.3 Hierarchy of influences model (Shoemaker 1991; Shoemaker & Reese 1996; 2014)***

The historical hierarchy of influences model is pivotal in gatekeeping theory formulation. Shoemaker's (1991) study, which she later co-authored with Reese in 1996 and 2014, revisited Lewin's (1947) broader context of field theory. It projected that, aside from the individual editor, there are other influencers of news content. The model "takes into account the multiple forces that simultaneously impinge on the media and suggest how influence at one level may interact with that at another" (Shoemaker & Vos 2014:1). Succinctly, the hierarchy of influences model sets forth that the production of media and media products themselves, can be influenced and, therefore, analysed at the individual, routine practices, organisational, social institutions and social systems levels. This model captures the news process of traditional mass media, conceptualising all the levels as factors or agents that exert various degrees of influence on news content.



**Figure 5.4 Hierarchy of influence model (Shoemaker 1991; Shoemaker & Reese 1996; 2014)**

Hanitzsch and Hoxha (2014:8) are of the view that earlier studies (White 1950) tended to suggest greater autonomy and influence on news production by journalists at the individual level. However, recent works (Ferreira 2018; Kepplinger, Brosuis & Staab 1991; Singer 2014) have proved limited influence. To corroborate this assertion, initial hierarchy of influences models (Shoemaker 1991; Shoemaker & Reese 1996) proposed the hierarchy with the individual level, figurative of White's (1950) conception of "Mr. Gates" as that which "determines" (Anderson 2017:186) the other levels (micro, meso, to macro-ordering). However, the recent revision shows a sociologically-oriented reversed ordering with the social systems level as the primary (macro, meso, to micro ordering) level. Though they argue that the ordering is less important than the ability to see how they interact, it suggests that "Mr. Gates" or individual journalists, though socialised with news values by virtue of the fact that they are professional journalists, are also constrained by supra-individual levels of influences that shape their routines and norms. Professional journalists, by their training, make similar

decisions regarding available news stories (Schudson, 2003). However, higher level influencers like the professional standardised values reign superior over their individual decisions. This implies that narrower levels of influence are constrained by the larger levels in the order in which they are arranged up to the ideological or sociological level. The supra-individual levels of influences are depicted by the routine level, organisational level, social institution level and the social systems level.

This new ordering, which acknowledges the seeming blurring and withdrawal of national and international barriers, sharply contrasts White's (1950) concept of gatekeeping and even the initial ordering of the hierarchy of influences model. The social systems level now serves as "the foundation from which all media content is constructed, the macro-level base upon which influences from other levels rest" (Shoemaker & Reese 2014:93). The implication is that issues at the social systems level impact organisational routine and all others below it.

On the micro level, the individual signifies the individual journalist who influences news content based on his socialisation, values and ideologies, similar to "Mr. Gates". The creativity of journalistic professionals matters in constructing the media reality. Shoemaker and Rees (2016:398) opine that "the individual level analysis considers the personal traits of newsmakers, news values they adhere to, professional roles they take on and other demographic features". In reality, journalists are constrained largely in their environment but their psychological attributes and autonomy often comes into play when there is a need to make decisions. Thus, making this level of influence essential.

Shoemaker (1991) and Shoemaker and Reese's (1996, 2014) routines level refers to standardised practices that journalists follow in the news making process (Gans 1979; Tuchman 1977). These practices often conform to the patterns of behaviour that outlays the immediate media structures. These routines could be written or unwritten but their constant practice has become sort of a ritual. Journalists have had to adopt these routine actives by consulting standard sources, asking standard questions, and writing reports in a highly standardised manner. Most of these journalistic routines have, overtime, become acceptable professional standards which are shared across organisations. Reese and Shoemaker (2014) attest that, in the past, organisational norms had been considered as a routines-level phenomenon. However, this has been reshaped in the internet era where technology has influenced the way a lot of media activities are performed, such as holding virtual newsroom meetings online and being able to send information through even from remote places.

The third level is the news organisation. In terms of influence, the organisational level is greater than the individual and the routine levels (Carpenter, Nah & Chung 2015:509). Organisational factors such as market characteristics, ownership and size impose significant influence on the work of journalists (Epstein 1974; Hirsch 1977). Further impact is felt by organisational goals, roles assignments, the organisational structure, organisational policies and how they are implemented and enforced to ensure achievement (Shoemaker & Reese 1996:136-138). The tautness at the organisational level is often experienced during times of social and socio-cultural transformation (see for instance Lee & Chan 2008; Usher 2014).

The fourth level describes social institutions outside of the news organisation that exert some amount of external influence on the news organisation. Institutions such as audiences, governments, news sources, public relations agencies, advertisers, religious and other media institutions that impart information to the media organisation, constitute the social institutions level (previously extra-media). The influence at this level is in the “inter-organisational field” (Reese & Shoemaker 2016:402). Thus, often based on mutual structured dependency relationships with other major systematic players. For instance, journalists confer with such level institutions either as sources of information or for verification of facts. These parties depend on journalists to inform, educate and persuade citizens in their favour (Lewis, Williams & Franklin 2008; Reese & Shoemaker 2016; Reich 2009). Paradoxically, and as discussed in Chapter Two, news media audiences who are within this bracket were in the past considered passive because they exerted minimal influence on the news media organisation. However, this has changed in the digital age (Anderson 2011; Lee, Lewis & Powers 2014).

Finally, the social system level, being the base on which all other levels of influence rest (Reese & Shoemaker 2016; Shoemaker, Vos & Reese 2009:82), describes the highly macro-level influence of social and cultural structures, as well as the values of society. It deals with “traditional theories of society and power that relates to the media” (Reese & Shoemaker 2016:403), making its impact span national boundaries. This level tends to be “relatively formal and articulated-systems of meanings, values and beliefs ... that can be abstracted as a ‘worldview’ or ‘world-class outlook’” (Williams 1977:105). A study by Lee and Chan (2008) in Hong Kong, for instance, portrayed the impact of the social systems level when they exposed how a strong tradition of journalistic professionalism in the country had been taken over by self-censorship.



They opine that following the handover of political power to the mainland government, local media now felt massive political pressure, resulting in self-censorship before publishing information. This stresses that social change, which could have a world-view or a social systems perspective, still impacts the local media. Since this influence and studies of this nature have a global outlook, its impact surfaces in cross-national analysis and affects all other levels which have local or national outlooks. In the words of Becker (1984:69), ideology “governs the way we perceive our world and ourselves; it controls what we see as ‘natural’ or ‘obvious,’”. Thus, making it imperative as a “frame of reference ... to which all of us adjust our actions”. Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) three models of media and politics exemplify the social systems level.

## **5.6 Gatekeeping in the digital era**

The digital media era presents a complex gatekeeping phenomenon which comprise activities of traditional media, media audiences and other emerging online news outlets like blogs, as well as algorithmic systems. In the evolving media age in this digital era, some media scholars who consider the gatekeeping concept to mean just the theory often assume that the whole concept of gatekeeping has “collapsed” or was irrelevant due to the inclusion of non-journalistic forces into the news process. While some have suggested that everybody is a gatekeeper in the digital era (Shoemaker & Vos 2009:33), essentially because access to news is no more unidirectional from mass media to audiences, others maintain that there are no more gatekeepers in the digital era (Williams & Carpini 2004; Kovach & Rosenstiel 2001). Media audiences, blogs, news aggregators and other emerging online news outlets now have the ability to decide what information the public should know and what they should not (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2001). This is because there are no discrete gates like those manned by

Mr. Gates, as in White's (1950) study. Rather than seeing the new participants in the news process as competitors, their role could be viewed as complementary to the roles of journalists, and the new mechanisms as a continuity to existing editorial practices. Williams and Carpini (2004) suggested, for instance, that if there are no gates, there are no gatekeepers. However, to clarify and set the record straight, Welbers and Opgenhaffen (2018:4731) opine that a distinction has to be drawn between the theoretical tradition of gatekeeping and the metaphor, which is a representative function and, as such, not rigid.

The metaphor of gatekeeping is an interpretive tool (Heinderyckx 2015), referring to the roles performed by people and technological tools that have access to information which they have to share with others. At the point of sharing information with others, everybody assumes the role of a metaphorical gatekeeper by determining what others should see. The idea of technological tools, for instance, performing the gatekeeping function is evidential in the argument that traditional media have lost control over media content, as they did in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. This notwithstanding, the metaphorical gatekeeper concept does not take away from the important theoretical purpose of gatekeeping, which is "the notion that media gatekeepers are central, particularly influential and generally trusted entities within the processes of widespread information diffusion about current [and important news about] events and issues" (Ernste 2014a:33). This corroborates Hindman's (2009:13) assertion that "Gates and gatekeepers remain a critical part of the information landscape, even in the internet age". It also explains why traditional news media outlets cannot be left out of the gatekeeping equation on digital networks. Online news brands present a significant continuity of traditional print and broadcast parent brand routines (Arant & Anderson

2001). The normative roles and functions of traditional news media gatekeepers are essential to maintain news values and credibility, which are often neglected by media audiences and some emerging online news sources.

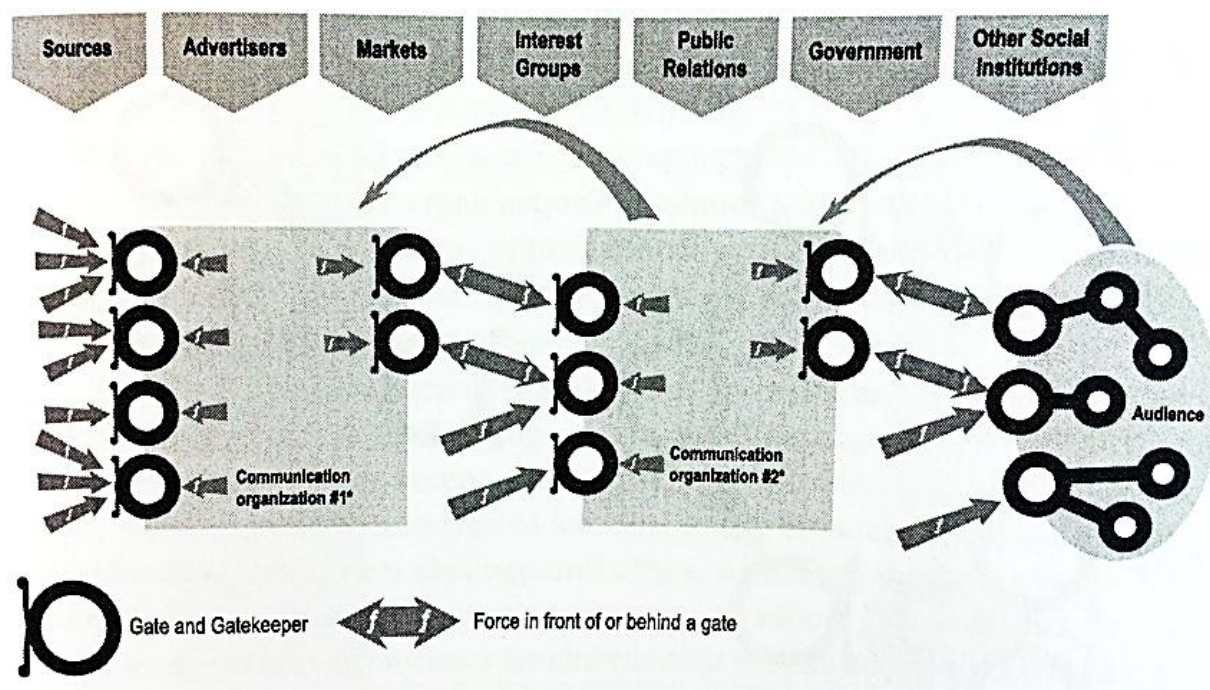
It is worth mentioning that an underlying advancement to gatekeeping theory building in the digital era is the crucial return to Lewin's (1947) field theory which emphasises the concept of channels and the influence of multivariate and environmental factors. The path travelled by news and messages right from the source to audiences can be conceptualised as a channel. The digital era presents a complex interconnectedness of news channels managed by traditional media, blogs, audiences and other emerging online media serving as gatekeepers. All gatekeepers, though independent, are also interdependent, because they can filter and alter messages before passing them on. Thus, nullifying the choices of gatekeepers before them and determining the information input of other gatekeepers further down the channel (Bass 1969; McNelly 1959). Such a system is similar to the operations within traditional mass media organisations where reporters feed various editorial levels with news about events and editors subject the information to editorial routines which could alter the original content.

From a broader viewpoint, channels exist between persons involved in news circulation and their intended recipients, including the interpersonal channels through which information diffuses throughout social networks. Shoemaker and Vos (2009), for instance, have conceptualised three channels in the gatekeeping process in the journalistic field. These include the source channel, the media channel and the audience channel. While the source and media channels concentrate on informing

audiences about news content of all news items available, the audience channel is preoccupied with providing the most popular news items. So that, while the source and media channels filter based on news values and what they deem newsworthy, the audience channel filters based on popular message characteristics.

In their modeling of gatekeeping theory in the digital era, Shoemaker and Vos (2009:130) admit that “It makes little sense to study a changing landscape with methods developed to study printed newspapers in the pre-computer era”. In the model, Shoemaker and Vos (2009) presented a more holistic framework that portrays the complex and interconnected environment within which gatekeepers operate. It shows an interweaving of channels and levels of influence on news and information content. As depicted in Figure 5.5, the squares represent news organisations like radio stations and other traditional media institutions and the ellipse portrays the audiences. Unlike previous models and frameworks where the audience had minimal influence, the audience are seen not as just passive receivers of news content, but rather as active news content creators and distributors who even feed information for inclusion into the news of media organisations. The circles represent individuals and the vertical bars represent the gates operated by these individuals. Within the ellipse of audiences, it is evident that, though individuals contribute to news sharing and distribution, they do not guard specific gates within the networks formed but set to share new content based on perceived newsworthiness. This implies that audiences may have their role as content creators and distributors, but do not engage in gatekeeping as done by news media outlets. This affirms Singer’s (2014) conception of them as secondary gatekeepers. The arrows represent the channels and two-way influence of news choices that media outlets and audiences have on each other. The original levels of

influencers are not portrayed in a hierarchy but are arrayed to depict that they proffer some amount of influence to the news and information process.



**Figure 5.5 Shoemaker and Vos' holistic digital gatekeeping model (2009:11)**

Central to this study is the fact that news media organisations like radio stations have assumed prominence in the digital era by converging their services with new media, in spite of the predictions of their demise (see Heinderyckx & Vox 2016:31). It is also observable that they still command great influence at their gates, consolidating their gatekeeping function and roles with reliable influence. Even audiences, who have been regarded as major challengers to the gatekeeping roles of news media organisations, are portrayed without discrete gates. Thus, indicating that they may create, edit or alter content for distribution but may not be privy to any news values to guide their activities. Subsequently, though audiences may influence the news content of news media organisations in terms of future news choices based on their feedback, they also depend on news media organisations like radio for information to distribute

within their personal networks. Although the model portrays audiences as sometimes providing news stories for inclusion in the news stories of news media organisations, Wallace (2018) observes that it fails to account for the possibility of non-journalistic actors breaking news. It also fails to acknowledge current news publication platforms like Twitter. The traditional media outlet is still recognised as the prominent news breaking and publishing outlet.

Another point of differentiation is that, the relative position of a gatekeeper in the channels determines the gatekeeper's influence. Communication organisation's or news media's strong presence and interdependence through monitoring and imitating other communication organisations illustrate the gate-watching phenomena (Bruns 2003; Thurman 2015:5) that no media organisation is an island. The force or influence on news content from these influencers could be negative or positive; and, the stronger the force, the more they will affect gatekeeping decisions. At the institutional level, the gatekeeping influence of one news organisation on another can also influence decision making. News brand extensions, such as online news outlets, sometimes depend on their parent brands such as radio stations for news information. In this regard, when the online brand extension lacks the potential to gather its own news stories, the dependence on its parent company will be significant. The more the online brand extension depends on its parent company, the greater the influence from the parent brand, and the lesser the gatekeeping roles of the online brand extension.

## 5.7 Networked gatekeeping models

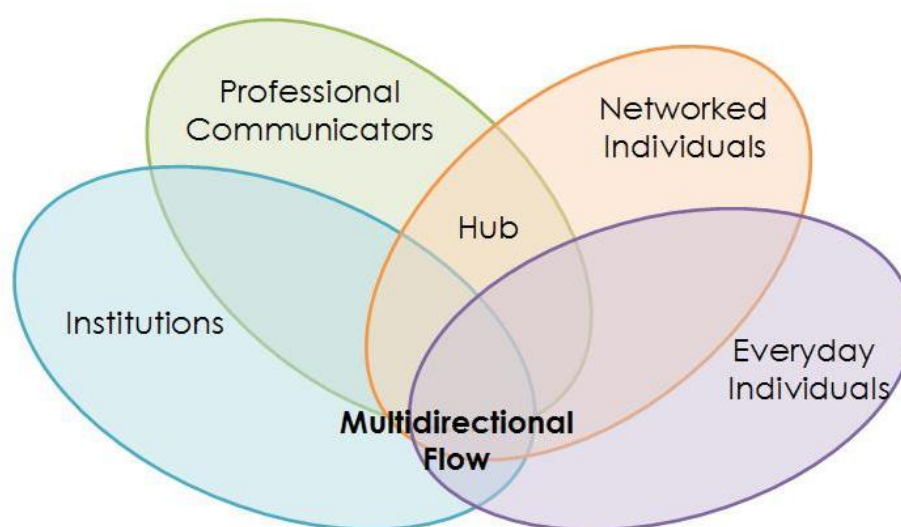
Amidst efforts to streamline new gatekeepers into digital gatekeeping modeling, scholars have suggested and proposed network gatekeeping as a solution to the tumult around the gatekeeping theorisation in the digital age (Barzilai-Nahon 2008). While many contemporary gatekeeping theories have not largely departed from the traditional mass media-dominated theories which do not acknowledge the interconnectedness of traditional mass media, audiences, emerging online digital platforms, other institutions and algorithms as partners in the twenty-first century gatekeeping process, full networked gatekeeping theories propose to fill these gaps.

Drawing on Lewin's (1947) field theory, Shoemaker (1991) observed that an understanding of the gatekeeping process in the digital era will not fall short of revisiting the foundational work of Lewin. Following that, an extensive review of literature and another call by Shoemaker and Vos (2009) for a return to Lewin's (1947) theory of channels, suggest that the concept of channels has not been thoroughly synthesised and espoused in gatekeeping literature. Arguably, that could have motivated the proposal of network gatekeeping theories as part of digital gatekeeping literature. Network gatekeeping further complicates the concept of gatekeeping but is aptly representative of the current news diffusion process. Journalists, audiences (much attention has been given to them already) and algorithmic mechanisms play interconnected roles in networked gatekeeping.

The activities of non-human actors, called algorithms (search engines, aggregators or rating and curation platforms), have further intensified questions surrounding the gatekeeping functions and roles of journalists. Aside from the competitive challenge

stemming from media audiences, these problem-solving algorithms add another twist and dimension to the discussions on gatekeeping. They depend on computed programming to perform “automated assignments of relevance to certain selected pieces of information” (Just & Latzer 2016:2), thereby facilitating human activity such as sharing information, collaborative ranking or automated rankings. Algorithms are said to govern information flows on a lot of digital platforms (Gillepsie 2014) and compete with human gatekeepers in traditional media in the construction of social reality (Just & Latzer 2016).

The multiplication of news channels and gatekeepers in the digital era, coupled with the volume of news messages diffused on a daily basis, warrants a reconsideration of the concept of channels and additional methodological boundaries to measure the increased pace of news diffusion. Further theorisation of gatekeeping in the digital media era by Chin-Fook and Simmonds (2011) is illustrated in their Multidirectional Flow Validations (Figure 5.6).



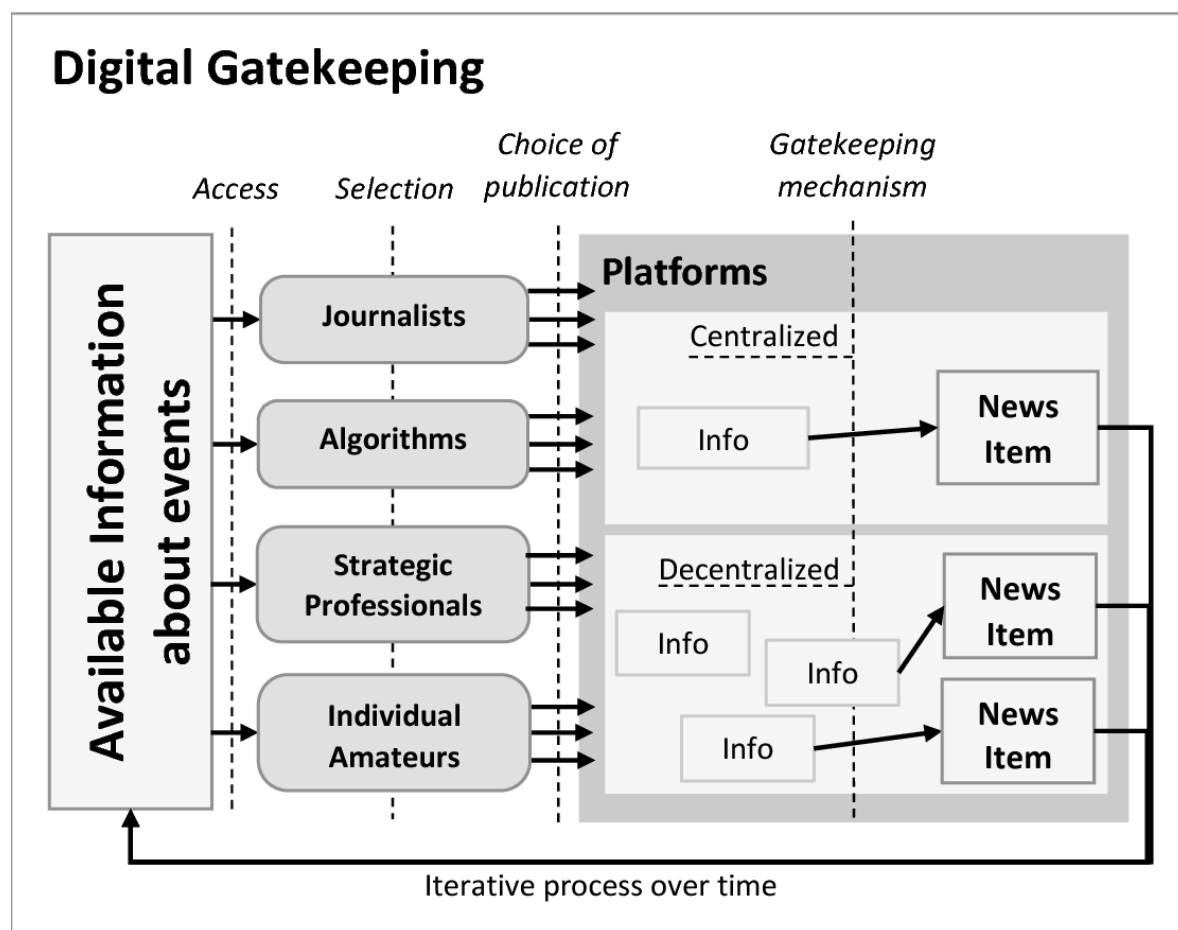
**Figure 5.6 Gatekeeping redefined - Multidirectional flow validations (Chin-Fook & Simmonds 2011:26)**



Chin-Fook and Simmonds' (2011) 'Multidirectional Flow Validations' highlight the multidirectional information flows on digital platforms, especially social media platforms like Facebook, and Twitter. It emphasises that, on digital platforms, information flows are multidirectional and not limited to news media organisations. Their model suggests interconnectedness and a network of actors, where everyday individuals, networked individuals, professional communicators and institutions influence one another in the flow of information on digital platforms. The model does not depart from previous ones which acknowledge the important role of traditional news media outlets and their gatekeeping roles even on digital platforms. The centrality of news gatherers and news processors (Bass 1969:72; Shoemaker & Vos 2009) is also emphasised, distinguishing news gatherers as networked individuals while news processors are professional communicators. The framework introduces a unique concept, the hub, into the modeling, which denotes the "nexus that connects everyday individuals and organisations" (Chin-Fook & Simmonds 2011:24). The hub serves as the centre of information flow, where most of the communication occurs (Bastos, Raimundo & Travitzki 2013). Within it, the multidirectional information flow is mediated by networked individuals and professional communicators.

Wallace (2018) redefines gatekeeping theory in a digital gatekeeping model (Figure 5.7), which incorporates professional journalists, algorithms, strategic professionals and individual amateurs as the gatekeepers who control the information that reaches society and, in the process, frames social reality. In this modeling, Wallace (2018:284) argues that "different types of gatekeepers differ in access, criteria for selecting

content and use of multiple spaces where content may be published". To this end, digital gatekeeping theory must include "multiple gatekeeper types that simultaneously interact with different gatekeeping mechanisms on various platforms" (Wallace 2018:284). This digital gatekeeping model is based on two steps: "the selection process of the gatekeeper" and "the gatekeeping mechanism of the platform" (Wallace 2018:285). In the process, four gatekeepers are identified as: journalists, algorithms, strategic professionals and individual amateurs. They have access to "specific sources" of information which are selected and framed for publication. Wallace (2018:285) opines that information selection is divided into three and this, coupled with news framing, defines "the differences in access to information, selection criteria and preferred spaces of publication". Similar to previous theorisations (Shoemaker 1991; Shoemaker & Reese 1996; 2014; Shoemaker and Vos 2009), the news selection process is influenced by multiple forces. Wallace (2018) attests that, the platform chosen dictates the specific gatekeeping mechanisms applied and ultimately the visibility of the published content. The digital spaces of traditional media outlets which still adhere to normative gatekeeping, editorial standards and values feature prominently. This indicates their continued presence and influence on news content production, even on these digital platforms.



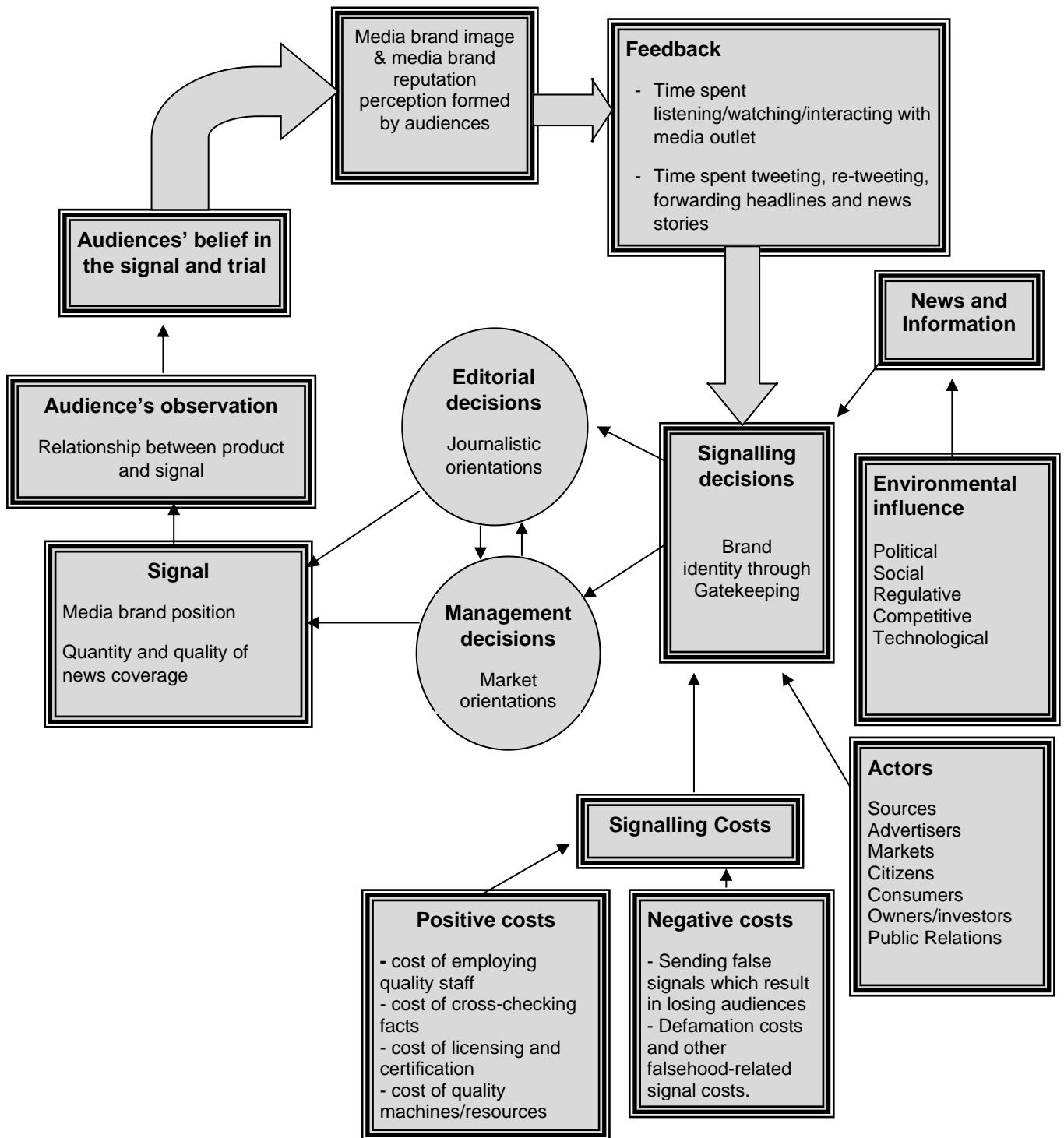
**Figure 5.7 Digital gatekeeping model (Wallace 2018:285)**

A defining characteristic of network gatekeeping models is the prominence of social media platforms that propel the diffusion of content, which largely occurs through technologically enhanced social network processes (Klinger & Svensson 2015) and mobile phone technologies. The network gatekeeping model explores the dynamics of information-transfers and information-negotiations between media gatekeepers and citizens who participate in the media's digital offerings. This includes public forums, web sites and social media (Xu & Feng 2014). Each active user is a participant in the news and content diffusion process because their engagement with news content (including liking, commenting, and sharing) makes the content visible to their personal social networks, thereby, promoting its propagation throughout the network (Hermida

et al. 2012). Furthermore, anyone can share links to news items, regardless of whether the news outlet shares the link. This is made easier through the widespread availability of social media buttons such as social media plug-ins on websites that allow people to directly like, comment, and share content (Gerlitz & Helmond 2013).

### **5.8 The conceptual framework**

The research was driven by the Signalling theory (Spence 1973) and the gatekeeping theory to portray the way news media audiences are influenced by the personality projected by the news outlet, which informs their decisions to diffuse news information in the digital era. The signalling informational feedback (Spence 1973:359) loop was amalgamated with gatekeeping theory into the conceptual framework in Figure 5.8. It served as a basis for data collection, analysis and presentation of the findings.



**Figure 5.8 Amalgamation of signalling informational feedback loop and gatekeeping theory into a conceptual framework**  
 Source: Author's construct, 2020

## 5.9 Summary

This chapter focused on extensive discussions into the theoretical underpinnings of the study, namely, signalling theory (Spence 1973) and gatekeeping theory. It was noted that signalling theory has been applied in a number of areas such as economics, anthropology, advertising and marketing. The key concepts of signalling theory (Spence 1973) were discussed, noting that the signaller is also called the trustee who possesses information about the quality of news programming. This quality is signalled to the receiver or trusters through a signal. Once the signal is positively interpreted by the receiver or truster, a feedback is sent to the signaller in the form of time spent listening, watching or logging on to a media outlet.

Gatekeeping theory was also delved into, noting that gatekeeping goes beyond the 'in' and 'out' movement of information to mean every process of transforming raw data into information or news. Various gatekeeping models have been discussed, from contemporary to digital and networked gatekeeping, focusing on the inadequacies of existing models to serve as analytic frameworks for innovations that technology and the internet provide. This has been the background to the many gatekeeping models established. Furthermore, the prominent representation of traditional mass media outlets such as radio on digital platforms and in digital and networked gatekeeping models was discussed. Though traditional media was anticipated to be rendered extinct by technological advancements and the internet, they have rather stood up to the challenge by converging their services with new media. Credit was given to Lewin's (1947) field theory, which charted the path for gatekeeping theorisation, emphasising the influence of gatekeepers and the environment on decision making in the various channels of food distribution. This landmark study, which proposed possible

application in other fields, was seen to have influenced White's (1950) groundbreaking gatekeeping study in the media. Though critiqued as overly simplified and significantly departing from Lewin's (1947) original study, White's (1950) study and modelling of gatekeeping in the media paved the way for further media gatekeeping studies. Shoemaker's (1991) Hierarchy of Influences model, which she later co-authored with Reese in 1996 and 2014, suggested a return to Lewin's (1943) field theory. The authors proposed five levels of influence that take into account the multivariate forces that interact with each other and simultaneously impinge on media content. These are the individual, routine, organisational, social institution and social systems levels. These contemporary gatekeeping models were identified to project the unidirectional flow of information from media organisations to audiences, emphasising the gatekeeping roles and functions of traditional media.

The chapter further discussed digital and network gatekeeping models which have been proposed as a panacea to the changing media landscape which is technologically driven. It was noted that "it makes little sense to study a changing landscape with methods developed to study printed newspapers in the pre-computer era" (Shoemaker & Vos 2009:130). In view of this, Shoemaker and Vos' (2009) holistic gatekeeping theory was discussed, along with Chin-Fook and Simmonds' (2011) multidirectional flow validations, as well as Wallace's (2018) digital gatekeeping model. It was observed that, though these models take into account the multichannel digital environment with active participation from audiences, blogs and other emerging online news outlets, traditional media like radio are prominently represented. The normative gatekeeping functions and roles of traditional media were seen to be relevant and prominent even on digital platforms to serve as credible news sources. Thus, affirming

Wallace's (2018) position that, the platform chosen dictates the specific gatekeeping mechanisms applied and ultimately the visibility of the published content.

Finally, by amalgamating the informational feedback loop in signalling (Spence 1973) with gatekeeping theory, a conceptual framework was developed as a pictorial representation of gatekeeping and signaling among the media fraternity in the digital era. The conceptual framework served as a guide to data collection, data analysis and data presentation in the study.



## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter details the research philosophy and methodology applied in this study. It outlines the thematic approach used for data gathering and analysis based on the conceptual framework drawn from an amalgamation of signalling theory and gatekeeping theory. The research problem and the objectives of each study dictate the research philosophy, methods of investigation to be adopted, as well as the research design to achieve the set objectives. The questions posed in this study indicate a comparative investigation into the gatekeeping procedures observed by radio online brand extensions against those of solely online news outlets in Ghana, to build brand personality. As well as how the personality built is accepted by audiences to further diffuse their news stories. This is to help ascertain how digital media outlets plan the brand personality they project, based on their gatekeeping procedures, activities and the choices they make. The second part of the research question, which focuses on how news media audiences accept the brand personality projected by news media outlets in the digital environment, is dealt with by observing how audiences diffuse news stories and headlines on Twitter. This study depicts an exploratory analysis, and will be situated within the subjective ontology and interpretivist epistemology philosophies.

By using a “qualitatively-driven mixed methods research” approach (Creswell et al 2006; Mason 2006:9), the study adopted both qualitative and quantitative research methods with a qualitatively-led interpretation. The NodeXL software and semi-

structured interview guides were used as data collection instruments. This was done to allow the audiences' news diffusion activities to be plotted on descriptive graphs, with semi-structured interviews conducted with relevant staff of the sampled online digital brands to achieve the set objectives. The aim was to explore how different radio online brand extensions and solely online news outlets with different characteristics went about their gatekeeping activities to build brand personality on digital platforms. As well as examining how media audiences accepted these brands. The chapter further elaborates on why this study was best approached using qualitatively-driven mixed methods and interpretivist paradigm to provide a systematic review of the processes engaged in. The final section of this chapter enumerates how the trustworthiness and authenticity of this thesis were ensured and the role that the researcher played in executing an ethically sound research study.

## **6.2 Research philosophy**

There are divergent opinions about the world and how each opinion works in relation to reality, knowledge development and existence in the context of academia (Mason 2014:49). These opinions are referred to as research philosophies, which are also enshrined in research paradigms, dictating the particular methods that are applicable in the paradigm. Research philosophy implies a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge (Saunders et al 2009a:124) that guides one's world view and governs how knowledge is gained and, subsequently, one's actions. Individual researchers have their particular beliefs, assumptions and perceptions about reality, sometimes referred to as the research philosophy. This influences their research approach and, generally, how they conduct research. Every research project

can be viewed through three philosophical lenses (Mason 2014:51; Saunders et al. 2009a:127), and these serve as the fundamental blocks for each study. These are the ontology, which are the assumptions about the nature of reality; epistemology/methodology, which are the assumptions about knowledge and how knowledge is communicated; as well as the methods used in conducting the research, such as data gathering and analysis methods. Finally, the axiology considers the values and ethics that govern the research process. These philosophical underpinnings are also enshrined in research paradigms, leaving each research paradigm with its own ontology, epistemology/methodology and axiology. In this study, the interpretivist paradigm is adopted, and the next section considers its application in this study from ontological, epistemological and axiological perspectives.

### **6.2.1 *The interpretivist paradigm***

The entire study was guided by the interpretivist paradigm, which is also a relativism movement that suggests that reality is socially constructed and mentally oriented. Furthermore, that there are multiple realities constructed by social actors (Bagele & Kawulich 2012:9; Scotland 2012:11). Ontologically, they believe that these multiple realities are based on individual perception, understanding and experiences, and also that “sense [is made] of reality in different ways depending on an individual’s unique background and experiences” (Pole 2007:1). This suggests that, to the interpretivist or relativist researchers, reality is subjective and differs from person to person. This is mediated by our senses through interactions and experiences with objects using language (Bagele & Kawulich 2012:10; Scotland 2012:11). Interpretivist researchers, thus, assume subject-subject positions in their studies, rather than subject-object

positions, as is found with the natural sciences (Dieronitou 2014:7). From the ontological and epistemology viewpoint of interpretivists, human beings are different from objects and cannot be studied using a natural science approach. Rather, it is the different meanings, times, cultural backgrounds and circumstances that lead to the creation of unique experiences and different social realities. Thus, humans are considered social actors rather than objects (Saunders et al. 2018:140). In relation to this work, media gatekeeping might have widely accepted standards, but based on unique cultural, social, political, work environment and resource-availability, differences exist in applications and the motivations behind news choices and preferred brand personality projections, making it difficult to totally superimpose one experience into another setting.

As the name suggests, the interpretive paradigm is a pragmatic research approach that assumes that both researcher and researched are linked. Such that, who we are and how we understand the world is a central part of how we understand ourselves, others and the world. A study of this nature within the Ghanaian context is non-existent, so this current study is aimed at filling this gap by considering the 'working theories' of participants which might be similar to international practices but emphasises the conduct and experiences garnered by participants based on Ghanaian 'local knowledge'. The ontology of this paradigm suggests an inter-subjective construction of reality through meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially. So that in interpretation, rich accounts of social phenomena, contextualised narratives and the use of rhetorical techniques were used to describe the work setting, cultural, social and conceptual structures that inform participants' actions uncovered and were relatively situated.

Critics to mixed-methods researchers (Denzin & Lincoln 2005; Howe 2004) argue that most mixed-methods studies assign auxiliary roles to the qualitative aspect of their study and, subsequently, take qualitative out of its natural critical and interpretive framework (Creswell et al 2006:2). This study aimed to counter this assertion by assigning an auxiliary or supporting role (Creswell et al 2006:8) to the quantitative aspect which is the graphical representation of audiences' news diffusion activities on Twitter using the NodeXL software. Again, the researcher corroborates with Deem (2002), who opines that interpretive research renders itself useful in using issues, language and research approaches that empower the participants, recognises the silenced voices, honours their individual differences and positions the researcher and participants' views in a historical, personal or political context. The semi-structured interviews and qualitative emphasis of this study helped to achieve this objective.

To conclude, interpretive studies stress the critical dialogue between the researcher and researched through a dialectical process aimed at an informed and sophisticated understanding of the social world. Semi-structured interviews in the work setting of the participants filled in this gap. Participants in the semi-structured interviews were given opportunities to express themselves on their assigned roles within the gatekeeping frameworks of their online digital news outlets. In addition, they expressed how they undertook those normative roles to define their brand image in the minds of their audiences to achieve the desired brand equity online.

### **6.3 Research design: exploratory**

Every research study is based on a research design, which defines the roadmap to achieve the set objectives. Creswell (2014:29) observed that research design is the conceptual framework or structure of research, which shows how all components of the research fit together logically to address the research problem. The research design served as a network, linking the different aspects of the research plan. This ensured that, like a puzzle, each aspect fits well together with the others in an orderly and logical way. In this study, the research design adopted was exploratory using a mixed-methods approach to unearth information about the way media outlets use their gatekeeping activities to plan their brand personality. In addition, examining how their audiences accept this brand personality to diffuse their news stories on digital platforms. This is an area which has received little or no attention in Ghanaian media literature. An exploratory research approach, according to Saunders (2009a:141), is mostly employed as a potent tool for seeking new insights, especially in an area when little is known, or for understanding a problem or phenomenon which is less researched. It was, thus, ideal for the research on brand personality building through gatekeeping in the Ghanaian context, based on the literature available on their practices. The data collection methods, semi-structured interviews and news diffusion mapping on Twitter were exploratory and participative research methods, selected based on the researcher's philosophy, and adopted to meet the set objectives for the study.

#### **6.4 Research method: qualitatively-driven mixed research method**

Based on the research objectives, the study was best approached using the mixed-methods approach, adopting the convergent parallel mixed-method design (Creswell 2014). Mixed-methods research is defined as “an approach to inquiry involving collecting both qualitative and quantitative data, integrating the two forms of data, and using distinct designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks” (Creswell 2014:4). Mixed-methods studies, though incorporating quantitative and qualitative methodologies can either be skewed towards quantitative or qualitative, based on the emphasis dictated by the study. As indicated in Chapter One, the approach to this study was qualitatively-driven mixed-methods (Creswell, Shope, Plano Clark & Green 2006; Mason 2006:9). This means that, though both qualitative and quantitative research methods, research objectives, research questions, research design, data collection, data analysis, and results (Creswell & Plano Clark 2011; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner 2007) have been combined, interpretation was qualitatively-led (Lieberman 2005). Some stereotypical perspectives to mixed-methods studies suggest qualitative methodologies in an “auxiliary role” in mixed research studies (see Denzin & Lincoln 2005; Howe 2004). However, questions of “What is happening? Is there a systematic effect? And why or how is it happening?” (Creswell, Shope, Plano Clark & Green 2006:2), as in this study, require a qualitatively-driven mixed-method enquiry.

This implies that, interpretive qualitative dimensions and explanations were largely applied and more attention was given to in-depth analysis of qualitative themes than the statistical results. Subsequently, by shaping and informing the research design, qualitative data was used to expand and elaborate on quantitative findings. At the

same time, qualitative ethnography helped to explicate the social and contextual Ghanaian digital media influences explicitly. Finally, this study was best approached from the mixed-methods research perspective because the different methods of data gathering, analysis and data outcomes yielded from both approaches were essential to answer the research questions posed. This did not require numerical responses only, but rather detailed explications.

A mixed-methods research approach yields a number of benefits over individual paradigm studies, especially for a study like this. Creswell (2014:215) argues that when the mix-method is used in research, it “provides a stronger understanding of the problem or question than either by itself.” By combining both qualitative and quantitative research approaches in one study, mixed methods research presents itself as a comprehensive methodological approach that neutralises the biases and weaknesses associated with individual research methods. Thus, making the outcome of the study stronger and more rigorous (Creswell 2014:15; Creswell, Shope, Plano Clark & Green 2006:5). In addition, by triangulating data sources and converging findings from all the sources, one data source could be used to check the accuracy or validity of the other data sources.

Another point worth noting is that, because the qualitative and quantitative methods use different criteria in measuring quality and trustworthiness, such as validity and reliability for quantitative study, and credibility, dependability and confirmability for qualitative study, a combination of the various criteria in a single study strengthens the study. For mixed methods studies, Fetters and Freshwater (2015) attest that the



combination of qualitative and quantitative components produces an integration that is greater than the sum of each component.

Combining both quantitative and qualitative methodologies in a single study provides the needed breadth and depth. Therefore, based on the objectives and research questions of a study, if the sample population falls within the framework of the two data pools of quantitative and qualitative, both methodologies are worth applying. Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007:123) have argued that “for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration,” mixed method approach to study is encouraged. Qualitative methods search for details of phenomena and are essential for unearthing information about issues that are not well understood. Therefore, they do not deal with large data pools. Oakley (cited by Creswell et al 2006:7) confirms that the essence of qualitative methods in mixed-method studies is that qualitative methods;

acknowledge multiple viewpoints, the role of values, and the subjectivities of both the researcher and those researched. Thus, qualitative has an advantage of ‘thinking from caring,’ investigating actual practices and relations, and the ‘iterative attention to the details ... and the forms of analysis dedicated to reproducing all of this is ‘faithfully’ as possible.

This substantiates the position that qualitative methods add a naturalistic perspective to mixed-method studies by not “attempting to control them [those researched] or edit them out” (Mason 2006:17). Information gathering regarding online news editors’ experiences of gatekeeping and brand personality initiatives was best achieved through qualitative methods of enquiry such as semi-structured interviews, as used in this study to achieve the needed depth.

On the other hand, quantitative methods concern the comparison of characteristics of discrete and numeric data. This data is often larger in size and population, and cannot be adequately addressed by qualitative methodologies. The quantitative angles and analysis introduce some breadth to mixed-methods studies. Comparing and studying the news diffusion of various news media outlets within the personal networks of their audiences on Twitter, for instance, will be difficult to be carried out using only qualitative research methodologies. The large data expected on Twitter was ideally covered using descriptive graphs and quantitative methodologies in the NodeXL software. This is indicative of the fact that large-sample or group comparison research is effectively approached quantitatively (Creswell 2013; Tashakkori & Teddlie 2010).

The convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell 2014:219) was adopted in collecting and analysing data for this qualitatively-driven mixed-methods study. This research design advances that data collection is approached using both qualitative (open-ended) and quantitative (close-ended) means distinctively based on set objectives and research questions. Data collected is then analysed using suitable paradigm-specific procedures and methodologies independently. The analysed data in both approaches are then integrated to generate meaning through critical interpretive synthesis (Markoulakis & Kirsh 2013).

## **6.5 Sampling methods**

In research, sampling means the process of selecting a representative part or units from a population of interest for the purpose of determining parameters or characteristics of the whole population. Sampling for this study was conducted in three parts. The first involved sampling for the radio online digital brand extensions and

solely online digital news outlets without traditional media affiliation out of the target population of all online news websites hosted in Ghana. Secondly, there was a need to determine the staff of the online news website who had to be interviewed for information on gatekeeping procedures, branding, as well as attracting audiences. Finally, a search criterion had to be defined in sampling the audiences' tweets, retweets and mentions within the Twitter platform of the online digital news brands. This was also necessary to identify the nodes (individual users) and directed edges (network ties) that served as the news diffusion path or channel.

The first decision was the selection of online digital news platforms, which was largely judgemental. The selection of *peacefmonline.com*, *citifmonline.com* and *myjoyonline.com* out of 39 radio online digital brand extensions in Ghana (radio.com.gh 2019) was purposive. Similarly, *modernghana.com*, *mynewsghana.net* and *newsghana24.com* were also selected out of all solely online news outlets without traditional media affiliation for "substantive significance or theoretical relevance" (Dubé & Paré 2003:609). Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009b:237) postulate that purposive or judgmental sampling allows for the selection of cases that will best enable the researcher to answer research questions and to meet objectives.

*Peacefmonline.com*, *citifmonline.com* and *myjoyonline.com*, all located in Accra, the capital city of Ghana, are online brand extensions of three very credible radio stations with long standing reputations that span years of service. *Peace FM*, the parent brand of *peacefmonline.com*, was the first local language commercial FM station to be established after concerns were raised about the dominance of the English language on Ghanaian radio when the airwaves were liberalised in the 1990s (Blankson 2005).

It was licenced by the National Communications Authority (NCA) of Ghana on the 4<sup>th</sup> February, 1998 (National Communications Authority 2017). It is owned by the Despite Media Group, which is an anchor in local language broadcasting with all media outlets under its umbrella operating specifically in the *Akan* language. It boasts of four FM stations, three of them – *Peace FM*, *Okay FM* and *Neat FM* - are located in the Greater Accra Region and one, *Hello FM*, is in Kumasi, the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The owner also has one television station in Accra – *United Television (UTV)* - in addition to his numerous businesses that are not broadcasting related. *Peacefmonline.com* is the radio online brand extension, with a social media Twitter platform as an addition to help audience interactivity. The Twitter handle was added in August 2009 (twitter.com).

*Joy FM*, an English language FM station, is also the parent brand of *myjoyonline.com*. It was first licenced by the NCA on 13<sup>th</sup> January, 1995 (National Communications Authority 2017), as one of the first commercial FM stations after the liberalisation of the media airwaves in Ghana in the 1990s. Owned by the Multimedia Group, the language use of this parent company is English, but they also have an *Akan* language brand extension. *Joy FM* in Accra and *Luv FM* in Kumasi operate in English, while *Adom FM* in Tema and *Nhyira FM* in Kumasi operate in the *Akan* language. The Multimedia Group also has two online brand extensions, that is, *myjoyonline.com* and *adomonline.com*, arguably to augment the news brands of the English language media and local language media respectively. *Myjoyonline.com* is the radio online digital brand extension. The social media Twitter platform was launched for audience access from August 2011 (twitter.com).

*Citifmonline.com*, owned and managed by Omni Media Limited, was carved out of Citi FM which is the parent brand. Citi FM was authorised by the National Communications Authority on 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2002 (National Communications Authority 2017), but on-air operations started in 2004 on the frequency 97.3. Aside from the radio brand, it also has a television brand. Though not as old as Joy FM and Peace FM, *Citi FM* has been recognised for its meritorious work in the media space in Ghana. It was, for instance, adjudged the best English-speaking radio station in Ghana at the 24th Ghana Journalists Associations' (GJA) Awards Ceremony held on 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2019. *Citifmonline.com*, is the radio online brand extension of Citi FM with the social media Twitter platform as an addition to help audience access and interaction with the media outlet. The Twitter handle was added in January 2010 (twitter.com). As of 28<sup>th</sup> September, 2020, the Twitter account had 1100,000 followings, with the handle also following 541 others.

According to the Geopoll<sup>3</sup> audience ratings for the period between May and July 2015, as well as the second quarter of 2017, *Peace FM* topped all FM stations in audience listenership in the Greater Accra Region with 27.4% and 12.6%, respectively. In the same rankings, *Joy FM* took the third position with 9.5% and 10.4%, respectively (Geopoll 2017c; Geopoll 2015). In the second quarter of 2016, *Peace FM* topped radio listenership with a national share of 9.7%. *Citi FM* and *Joy FM* were placed third and fourth with 5.2% and 4.9% national audience listenership, respectively (Geopoll [sa a]). In the summarised 2017 radio consumption rankings rated by audiences, *Peace FM* topped in all four quarters with an estimated audience of 111,000. *Citi FM* was

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<sup>3</sup> GeoPoll is a mobile surveying platform whose polls for the media in Ghana are highly recognised and accepted nationally and internationally (Geopoll sa b).

second with an audience consumption number of 84,000, while *Joy FM* maintained the third position with an estimated 83,000 audiences (Geopoll 2018).

*Peacefmonline.com*, *citifmonline.com* and *myjoyonline.com* have, on several occasions, alternated in emerging as winners for the top rating as the best online news website in Ghana (Geopoll 2017a; Geopoll 2017b). *Citifmonline.com*, *Myjoyonline.com* and *Peacefmonline.com* are placed in first, second and fifth positions, respectively, by BuzzGhana<sup>4</sup> out of seven authoritative online news media outlets (Obiorah 2018a). In separate general rankings of ten websites, *citifmonline.com*, *myjoyonline.com* and *peacefmonline.com* took the first, second and third places, respectively (Obiorah 2018b). The Feedspot<sup>5</sup> perceived *peacefmonline.com* as the top must-follow website in Ghana in 2020 out of 18 websites (Feedspot 2019). It is still the only online digital brand to watch out for of the three platforms above according to Feedspot (2020), while none of the other two stations received mention. Kikio Tolu News, in a ranking of the best ten radio stations in Ghana, ranks *Peace FM* as the best, with *Citi FM* and *Joy FM* taking the third and fourth positions, respectively (KikioTolu News 2019) (see also [Allyoucanread.com](http://Allyoucanread.com); [Saviour-sanders.com](http://Saviour-sanders.com); [similarweb.com](http://similarweb.com); and [alexa.com](http://alexa.com)). It is evident that the three radio online digital brand extensions under study represent the best in their category

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4 BuzzGhana is a news and entertainment website that focuses on topical issues to inform its audiences. It also scouts around to give its audiences the benefit of spending less time to get alternative and critical news on other authentic websites by recommending and suggesting such alternatives (BuzzGhana sa).

5 Feedspot is a blog that offers services to consumers and marketers on where to get the best deals regarding content reading, E-mail digest, data curation, blogger outreach, blog promotion and brand monitoring.

in Ghana.

In sampling solely online digital news outlets, the criteria set was to select outlets that were hosted in Ghana and also report on general news like politics, business, entertainment and sports. Such outlets should not be news aggregators, but online outlets that had offices and so operated as a formal news outlet. Such online news outlets should have been in operation for over a year and they must have Twitter accounts with over 1,000 followers. Based on the set criteria above, *Modernghana.com*, *Newsghana24.com* and *Mynewsghana.net*, all hosted in Accra, were selected. Though these online news brands do not have traditional media affiliation, they have distinguished themselves as credible solely online digital news sources in the Ghanaian media space.

*Modernghana.com* started operations in August 2005. Though it is quite young in the industry, it is a household name, especially among netizens because of its news type and reporting style. *Modernghana.com* is ranked as fourth by BuzzGhana (Obiorah 2018a) and second by *allyoucanread.com* (*allyoucanread.com* [sa]). *Modernghana.com* joined the social media Twitter platform in June 2009 (*twitter.com*), with over 33,500 followings as at the end of September 2020, on the handle *@modernghanaweb* (*twitter.com*). *Mynewsghana.net* was launched on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2015. After operating for a year, it joined Twitter in October 2016 with the handle *@mynewsghana*. As at the end of September 2020, its Twitter account had 1,536 followings (*twitter.com*). *Newsghana24.com*, with the Twitter handle *@ghanaeducation5*, is a relatively younger online digital brand compared to the

preceding two. It started operations as an online news platform in 2018 and joined Twitter in April 2019 (twitter.com). As at the end of September 2020, *newsghaha24.net* had 1,728 followings on its Twitter account (twitter.com).

Identifying staff members from the six online news websites for the semi-structured interviews was not a daunting task. Social media managers, online news editors and social media news curators of the online news websites and social media platforms were interviewed based on their specialised job descriptions. Essentially, the study was interested in how gatekeeping on the online news platforms and Twitter accounts influenced brand personality building and, subsequently, how the brand personality built impacts news diffusion within the personal networks of their audiences on Twitter. Online news editors handle news websites by selecting news stories for publication online. Social media curators and managers are also responsible for managing social media platforms in terms of selection of news stories and links for publication, as well as handling correspondence and feedback from their audiences. The officers, therefore, served as the most relevant individuals to provide the required information for the study.

The final sampling undertaken was selecting the audience news diffusion activities on the Twitter handles of the online digital news media outlets and creating personal networks in the process for importing into the NodeXL software. All tweets, retweets, and mentions associated with news stories, links, headlines and pictures shared or published by the six online news websites on their Twitter accounts were generated and imported onto the NodeXL software to plot descriptive graphs. These helped to project the level of news diffusion activity for each network. The diffusion links or



directed edges were plotted to identify the direction of information flow and the nodes identified the audiences' individual positions and news sharing activities. This was necessary to identify the very active audiences who were the major news distributors or diffusers.

## **6.6 Data collection techniques and analysis methods**

The techniques and instruments used in data collection often determine the kind of data analysis to be done. Qualitative data require a different method of analysis from quantitative data, and vice versa. In mixed-methods studies such as this one, different levels of data analysis methods are required based on the type of data collected. Quantitative data collection and analysis deals with the collection, organisation and analysis of numerical facts or observations using charts, graphs and tables to give a condensed picture of the data (Neuman 2014:393). On the other hand, qualitative data analysis involves condensing unwieldy data in the form of descriptions about people, actions and events in social life into manageable and meaningful groups for interpretation (Kothari & Garg 2014:17). Qualitative research data often involves bits and pieces of information, especially if data is collected from different sources using a number of methods and instruments. Data analysis helps to systematically organise, integrate and examine data and, in the process, we search for patterns and relationships among specific details (Neuman 2014:477).

In this study, data was collected between 15<sup>th</sup> April 2021 and 14<sup>th</sup> May 2021. This was done consistently and simultaneously with data analysis in that, individual data source analysis started immediately data was collected. After the individual data source analysis, all data were reviewed and analysed together so that interpretation of

findings was based on the converged information to answer the research questions and to ensure triangulation. The following sections elaborate on the systematic steps undertaken in data collection and analysis.

### ***6.6.1 Graphical representation of audiences' news diffusion activities on Twitter using the NodeXL Software***

The study collected data from the Twitter social media handles of each of the six online digital news brands being studied through the Twitter Application Programming Interface. Most content on Twitter is publicly available for collection and studying, eliminating a lot of privacy issues, unless the account is a private one. The study employed the NodeXL software, a Microsoft Excel add-on because it is “a more user-friendly piece of software...that allows for the collection and analysis of social networks” (Ernste 2014b:[sn]). Research suggests that using the NodeXL software to collect logs of data about user activity on social media and to measure social network groups and their relatedness or interconnectivity eliminates limitations such as biases and recall (Babbie 2012; Himelboim, Smith & Shneiderman 2013:195) compared to surveys (Chaffee et al 2001; Stroud 2008), experiments (Knobloch-Westernwick 2012) and interviews (Stromer-Galley 2003). Quantitative network matrices of Twitter data in this study made it possible to “systematically dissect the social world, creating a basis on which to compare networks, track changes in a network over time, and determine the relative position of individuals and clusters within a network” (Hansen, Shneiderman & Smith 2011:39). Data was collected weekly (7-days interval) because that was the criteria allowed by the Twitter network.

By measuring dimensions like matrices of betweenness centrality, network density and

modularity, the validity and reliability of user activity was ensured. Matrices of betweenness measures the frequency each user node or vertex appeared on the shortest path between two other nodes or vertexes present in the network or ties of information diffusion (Groshek & Al-Rawi 2015; Groshek & Tandoc 2017; Hansen, Sheiderman & Smith 2011:40). This is a way to assess the important role and position of some nodes in linking other nodes to the main source of information dissemination. So that, a disconnection of that central node would interrupt information flow to other members in the network (Hansen, Sheiderman & Smith 2011:40). Modularity, on the other hand, helps to identify the major influencers of news stories through their diffusion and sharing activities by plotting the communities or subgroups whom they influenced. Network density, then, focuses on how “highly connected vertices are by calculating the percentage of all possible connections that are realised” (Hansen, Sheiderman & Smith 2013:39).

The NodeXL software provides an interface to collect social media network data and enables the measurement of selective exposure of users to messages from other users (Himmelboim, Smith & Shneiderman 2013:196) and networks by defining essential boundaries for social network analysis. This helps to understand the networked gatekeeping process like local, state, national or international geographic locations (Ernste 2014b). The NodeXL software helps to detect actual patterns of individual’s exposure to peers and information sources (Himmelboim, Smith & Shneiderman 2013:195) by identifying individuals and network groups that participated in particular discussions. This includes the links and connections among them, that are created by their followings in the form of mentions, tweets, retweets and reply relationships. NodeXL identifies individuals with nodes, while directed graph

edges represent the network ties and relationships among various nodes. The size of each node determines its degree of importance in sharing and diffusing information through the network of users. Simply put, a large node, indicates an extensive connection with other users and a diverse diffusion of news or information across diverse user groups. The size of the nodes also exposes the degree of influence that a user has in connecting and diffusing news across diverse networks and user groups (Groshek & Tandoc 2017:205).

The data collection and plotting of graphs preceded the semi-structured interviews because the researcher wanted to reduce bias and interference on the part of the online news media platform. As an initial process, the researcher had to register on the Twitter network to obtain an account. All six online news platforms were then followed by the researcher to have access to their publicly available Twitter Application Programming Interface (API). Having done this, the researcher had access to the tweets, retweets, hashtags and mentions within their networks. Once logged in, one month of user-activity data was extracted from the Twitter social media application of all six online news websites on a weekly basis. This is because Twitter only allows an extraction of seven days data from its website. At the end of the period, four sets of data were produced for each online news platform for the one-month period. In all, 24 data sets were generated. Each data set was used to plot a graph of user-activities, thus, producing 24 distinct graphs. Data collection was undertaken for the period between 15<sup>th</sup> April, 2021 and 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2021.

### **6.6.2 Semi-structure interviews analysed using thematic analysis**

The quantitative graphical representations of audience news diffusion activities in Twitter plotted in the NodeXL software were calculable. They could not give the required depth and exploration into what went into gatekeeping decisions for news stories, and also how media outlets used gatekeeping for brand personality building. They could not also inform how or why media audiences chose media outlets and diffused their news stories as illustrated for each of the six online digital news outlets in the graphs. This led to a need for a data collection method that could unearth the required information in depth. This called for the use of semi-structured interviews which were analysed using thematic analysis.

Generally, gatekeeping and news diffusion within the media follows particular patterns that are accepted worldwide, however, the ontological position of this study is that experiences and interactions are situational, relative and contextual, based on social realities. So that, aside from the general concept and applications of news media gatekeeping, experiences within individual online digital media brands could differ, and differences could also exist between the radio online brand extension experience and that of the solely online digital news media outlet experience based on criteria such as organisational objectives. The need to explore these relative experiences informed the use of semi-structured interviews with online news editors, social media managers and social media curators of *peacefmonline.com*, *citifmonline.com*, *myjoyonline.com*, *modernghana.com*, *newsghana24.com* and *mynewsghana.net*. The interviews gave an opportunity for participants to share their exclusive experiences while at the same time helping to unearth details regarding their gatekeeping roles and functions online for the purposes of building and projecting their brand personalities.

Saunders et al (2009b:601) define semi-structured interviews as a “wide-ranging category of interview in which the interviewer commences with a set of interview themes but is prepared to vary the order in which questions are asked and to ask new questions in the context of the research”. The research objectives and questions set the basis for the interview questions and in preparing the interview schedules. The broad areas that the interview schedules covered included:

- 1 The differences and similarities between the gatekeeping roles and functions of traditional media gatekeepers and online news media gatekeepers on the online and social media platforms.
- 2 What informed the choices of news stories and headlines or pictures put on social media.
- 3 How online digital news media outlets get their audiences to buy into their brand.
- 4 The means by which online digital news brands got their audiences active through engagement and interaction.
- 5 How gatekeeping for brand personality building by radio online brand extensions differed from those of solely online news media platforms without traditional media affiliations.

These broad areas guided the preparation of three separate and detailed interview schedules for the online news editors, social media managers and social media curators.

The research questions posed suggested an in-depth investigation into the activities of online news media outlets in Ghana. Since information in this regard is limited or

non-existent, there was a need to use a tool that will help unearth information. This meant the espousal of a data collection method that was flexible and also afforded the researcher the opportunity to ask follow-up and probing questions. At the same time, allowing those being studied the opportunity to express themselves and give elaborate details. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews was capitalised on, with an interview guide as an instrument to ask leading questions and to probe for further information. This gave the researcher control over the sessions. The face-to-face interactional exchange of dialogue (Mason 2002:62) between the researcher and the participant gave participants confidence and enough trust in the researcher to express themselves (Du Plooy 2001:177), with versatility to talk about other related issues. The practicality and interactional nature of the interviews sometimes required that the order of questions on the interview schedules had to be varied depending on the context in which a respondent was addressing an issue. Related questions were asked to ensure the flow of the discussion.

Further to the above, using semi-structured interviews in this study was a way to source information from the targeted people themselves, unlike using questionnaires, for instance, where other people could complete the survey on behalf of the intended persons. The semi-structured interviews afforded the researcher the opportunity to interact with the online news editors, social media managers and social media curators of the various online news organisations themselves. These three groups of interviewees in each organisation were chosen for interviews because of their specific roles in relation to the subject under study. They are in charge of the online news website and social media accounts of their respective online news outlets. They decided which stories to post at what time and also manage audience feedback. They

were the final authority as far as the management of their various platforms are concerned. Thus, interviewing them increased the credibility of the information gathered (Bryman 2008:466; Saunders et al 2009b:323-234).

A total of 15 participants were interviewed instead of 18. These included six online and social media editors, four online and social media curators, and five online and social media managers. All three traditional media brand extensions (*peacefmonline.com*, *myjoyonline.com* and *citifmonline.com*) had a social media manager, social media curator and an online news editor, hence, the three professionals were interviewed for each outlet. The story was different for the solely digital brands, since some positions were vacant. *Mynewsghana.net* had a social media manager, social media curator and online news editor and so three interviews were held there. *Modernghana.com* had only an online news editor and a social media manager who multitasked on the duties of a social media curator. Two interviews were organised with them. *Newsghana24.com* had only an online news editor taking on the responsibilities of a social media manager and social media curator. Only one interview was held there but the session also covered questions for the social media manager and social media curator.

Interviews were held on different dates for the six institutions. Interviews were held from 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2021 to 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2021, with all respondents within an organisation interviewed on the same day. Respondents from *peacefmonline.com* were interviewed on 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2021; those from *myjoyonline.com* were interviewed on 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2021; while those from *citifmonline.com* were interviewed on 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2021. The interview



train hit *modernghana.com* and *newsghana24.com* on 13<sup>th</sup> May, 2021. Respondents from these two institutions were interviewed on the same day because they did not have all the staff required for this study. Staff of *mynewsghana.net* were interviewed on 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2021.

Official permission was sought by the researcher from the management of each online news media organisation before the commencement of the study. In addition, each participant was made to complete an informed consent form to indicate their voluntary participation in the interviews. Interviews lasted between 40 minutes and 80 minutes on Zoom, and each session was recorded with the permission of the participants.

After all semi-structured interviews had been conducted, audio-tape recordings from each of the sessions were first listened to for familiarisation. The researcher then transcribed each of them, read through them and made the necessary corrections. Copies of the transcripts were sent to the respondents to confirm the information and establish factual accuracy. Transcripts were read a number of times, to familiarise the researcher with the contents, and since the interview data was analysed using thematic analysis, reading through them for familiarisation helped to generate initial themes. Thematic analysis is a form of pattern recognition within data, which makes use of emerging themes as categories for analysis. This is done through careful reading and re-reading of the data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006:82; Bowen 2009:32). Various themes were generated with attendant subthemes to reduce the data and to summarise the transcripts (Saunders et al 2009b:491-492) (detailed explications are given on the theme generation methodology in Chapter Seven).

Meanings were given to the themes through further analysis.

In summary, preparing for the interview was carried out in three parts, namely the off-site preparation, the on-site/field interview, and the post interview processes. The off-site preparation process included four stages. The first stage was the development of the interview guide which was based on the research objectives and research questions. The interview guide was then pretested with four media practitioners who are also students of the Ghana Institute of Journalism. They volunteered to be used for piloting by responding to the interview questions. This was a useful process which led to the third stage of the off-site preparation stage, which is the restructuring of the questions. After the piloting, it was found out that some aspects of the interview guides needed review. Questions like “how has your internal structures and processes been transformed to respond to the digital and social media environment?”, as well as “how similar or different is gatekeeping on the online digital media brand from that of traditional radio?” were found to be applicable only to radio online digital brand extensions. This was a helpful process to re-organise the interview questions before the actual field work. The final stage involved seeking permission and booking appointments for interviews at the institutional and individual interviewee level. Institutional permission was sought before the ethical clearance process started. Once clearance was granted, the researcher contacted the media organisations for access. Individual permission was also sought from the interviewees before the interviews. In all, three semi-formal interview guides were designed for the three groups of interviewees – online news editors, social media curators and social media managers.

The second part of the semi-structured interview process was the on-site interviews.

However, because of Covid-19 restrictions, the interviews were held on Zoom. Informed consent forms were sent to the interviewees to complete via e-mail. All interview sessions were recorded with the permission of the respondents. The final or post interview part included transcribing the audio recordings, confirming transcripts with interviewees for factual accuracy, and effecting the necessary changes on the master transcripts after checking for further reading and analysis.

### **6.7 Data Analysis**

The study, though mixed-method, was approached qualitatively because the quantitative aspect served an auxiliary role in data collection and analysis. It included Twitter network visualisation of audience activities using the NodeXL software which produced quantitative matrices, which were interpreted qualitatively.

Research data, especially in qualitative studies, can be colossal. However, employing requisite analysis procedures to the vast amount of data collected, facilitates the process of making meaning, by organising the data into convenient forms. Analysing data involves condensing unwieldy data into manageable groups for interpretation (Kothari & Garg 2014:17). It calls for a thorough analysis process to transform the data into a form that can be interpreted. Data analysis involves a systematic and step-by-step approach in mining meaning from data gathered. This is done through organising and interrogating data in ways that unveil patterns, themes, relationships, explanations, interpretations, critiques, or may even generate theories (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007:564). Data analysis in this study was on two levels – the first involved graphical representation of audiences' activities within the Twitter social

media platform; and the second was analysis of semi-structured interview data. Data from the 15 interviewees resulted in enormous amounts of information and scattered ideas. For the data collected to be meaningful for use, there was a need to bring order, structure and meaning to the unwieldy data collected. This ensured order to align it with the objectives of the study (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delpont 2005:338, 339). This was done by identifying “salient themes, recurring ideas or languages and patterns of belief that link the participants” (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delpont 2005:338) with similarities in characteristics. Data analysis for the semi-structured interviews were approached inductively based on the conceptual framework, where emerging themes and sub-themes from the data, as presented by the participants were engaged through the lens of codes derived from the conceptual framework. Having undertaken the data analysis process manually, the researcher is in agreement with De Vos et al (2005:338) that data reduction and theme generation were the “most intellectually challenging phase of data analysis and one that can integrate the entire endeavour”.

The processes engaged in qualitative data analysis could be presented simply as follows:

- Data collection and recording;
- Data transcribing;
- Skimming through, reading and re-reading;
- Categorisation based on codes from the theoretical framework, i.e., gatekeeping, branding, signalling and news diffusion;
- Generating themes and sub-themes;

- Discussions on the various themes and sub-themes.

### **6.8 Trustworthiness and authenticity of findings**

This study was a mixed-methods study because it combined methodologies from both qualitative and quantitative approaches. However, the mixed-method was qualitatively driven, implying that emphasis was placed on the interpretive qualitative aspect, with the quantitative playing a supporting role. Graphical representations on NodeXL helped to plot audiences' activities and news diffusion within their personal networks on the Twitter platforms of the sampled online news media outlets. Though this process was mainly quantitative, data interpretation took a largely interpretive dimension.

After many years of its acceptance, Hammersley (2007:287) contends that qualitative study has come under criticism for lack of rigour and a defined set of quality criteria for judging it. Hammersley (2007:287) attributes this to 'mismatched paradigm comparative assessment', where qualitative studies are compared with quantitative studies, which has had defined criteria for quality assessment for a long time. He further adds that qualitative studies are perceived to lack explicit assessment criteria for quality. The criticism has centred on its interpretive and subjective nature. It is believed to fall short of serving evidence-based practice, since it does not explicitly ensure validity and reliability, as is evident in quantitative study.

Researchers, like Patton (2002), have expressed concern about how some qualitative researchers have succumbed to these pressures and applied validity and reliability in

judging the quality of their qualitative work, as in the case of quantitative research. Other researchers have suggested the need for alternative criteria for evaluating qualitative studies (Bryman 2008:376) because different paradigms require different data collection methods, instruments, as well as data analysis criteria. Healy and Perry (2000) have added their voices by arguing that the quality of a study should be judged by a suitable term within the paradigm of the study. This has called for a re-visitation of Lincoln and Guba's (1985:290) postulation that, since reliability and validity answer the question "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an enquiry are worth paying attention to?", they suggest the terms trustworthiness and authenticity as an alternative measure for validity and reliability in qualitative studies. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four-criterion construct for trustworthiness and authenticity have been widely accepted as a quality measure (Shenton 2004:64) in qualitative study. These are credibility for validity, transferability for generalisability, dependability for reliability and confirmability for objectivity. This study incorporated measures to uphold these constructs and these are outlined below.

To ensure credibility of a study and capture truthful representation, Lincoln and Guba (1985:304) suggest triangulation of different methods, research paradigms and data. This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative method in one study by generating qualitative and quantitative data. These two data sets have been analysed using suitable paradigm-specific methodologies and the findings converged for interpretation. Additionally, credibility and confirmability was improved by undertaking triangulation. This study applied data triangulation by employing a variety of data sources in terms of person, time and space. The multiple data sources confirmed Billups' ([sa]: 2) assertion that it produces greater depth and

breadth of understanding. Fifteen people with three distinct but complementary roles within six different organisations have been engaged from different angles through semi-structured interviews based on their roles, to project how online news media gatekeeping and branding impacts news diffusion among their online and social media audiences. Billups ([sa]:1) attests that “For institutional researchers, applying trustworthiness strategies not only demonstrates sound practice but also adds the elements of outreach, engagement and collaboration”.

The study did not aim to apply its findings or transfer the findings elsewhere due to differences in contextual arrangements and settings, which clearly depicted the relativity of qualitative studies. However, the researcher undertook a thick description of the activities of the online news editors, social media managers and social media curators of the six online news organisations. This was to drive a pictorial and representative view of the gatekeeping activities, as well as the differences and similarities in role-play among the various organisations. This helped to answer the second and third research questions. These sought to explore and compare the effectiveness of the gatekeeping roles and functions performed by online news websites and how these translated into audience traffic on their websites. This also helped to increase the credibility of the findings (Shenton 2004:69).

To ensure rigour, a researcher needs to undertake accurate data collection, coupled with a well-defined and well-structured data analysis procedure, which need to be done simultaneously (Huberman & Miles 2002:114; Yin 2009). This fact is corroborated by de Vos et al (2005:335) when they submit that there is an “inseparable

relationship between data collection and data analysis, and this is one of the major features that distinguish qualitative research from traditional research.” The two processes cannot be decoupled but have to be done concurrently or hand in hand. Data analysis in this study began immediately after data collection. While this ensured that all essential information was collected, it also ensured that all data was represented in the analysis since they were still fresh in the memory of the researcher, who had first-hand experience in data collection.

Qualitative research thrives on confirmation and verification of information, and this is enhanced when semi-structured interviews are used. The process is interactive, so it is possible to unearth a lot of details as the researcher is able to ask follow-up questions for detailed elaboration provided by the respondent. This can also serve as a process of verification and confirmation since the questions can be reframed in a bid to assess if the same answer could be given in different sentence framings. In line with this, Huberman and Miles (2002:114) suggest that to ensure rigour:

Analysis and verification...is something one brings forth with them from the field, not something which can be attended to later, after the data are collected. When making sense of field data, one cannot simply accumulate information without regard to what each bit of information represents in terms of its possible contextual meanings.

To stay true to the caution above, data collection was not compromised, ensuring the accuracy. Each interview session was audio-tape recorded and transcribed. Each respondent's transcript was sent to them for confirmation and to ensure factual accuracy before being used for analysis. The researcher also registered on the Twitter network and followed all six online news websites sampled in this study. This ensured that no tweet, retweet, hashtag or mention was missed during the period of the study.



All data within the sample were used for the plotting of the graph and interpretation. This allowed for systematic and converged analysis to be done simultaneously, avoiding misrepresentation and ensuring triangulation.

### **6.9 Ethical issues and the role of the researcher**

Although this study employed a mixed-methods approach, it was extensively executed using the interpretive and qualitative paradigm. Studies of this nature are often criticised on three main accounts. The first is the perceived subjective or biased role the researcher plays or assumes during the data gathering process. The second is that qualitative studies are often contextual and do not render the findings worth generalising. Finally, qualitative research is often alleged to lack rigour due to its reliance on perceived rather than authoritative information.

The researcher acknowledges that her interest expressed in radio-related studies and the survival of traditional media, especially in the digital era, prejudiced the choice of a research topic. However, the researcher made conscious effort to distance herself from potential swaying and framing of findings to reflect her views but to mirror events objectively by bracketing researcher bias. The researcher, therefore, introduced minimal prejudice and reflexivity on the research process.

It is well known that qualitative studies are contextual and often ethnographic in nature, making it difficult to generalise. Though this study considered six online news media websites that publish mainly Ghanaian news, each possesses largely differing

characteristics. This makes it difficult to generalise, even within the Ghanaian context. *Peacefmonline.com* is affiliated to a local language FM station, *Peace FM*, which differs from *myjoyonline.com* which is owned by an English language FM station, *Joy FM*. Though *citifmonline.com* is affiliated to an English language FM station, *Citi FM*, just like *Joy FM*, their target market and type of programming differ. These three online digital media brand extensions, though affiliated to radio stations which are traditional media, have different organisational objectives because they appeal to different segments of the Ghanaian population. As such, they have different brand personalities. On the other hand, *modernghana.com*, *newsghana24.com* and *mynewsghana.net* are not affiliated to traditional media, however, they have varying organisational goals and contexts. They all based in Ghana but have varying news reporting styles. The effect is that, although all three solely online digital news platforms report on issues that are extensively Ghanaian, their viewpoints on issues vary largely, thus, attracting different audience categories. The study, therefore, acknowledges these varying backgrounds and proposes that, for general conclusions and generalisations to be derived, it would be appropriate to widen the scope of the study.

The observation that largely qualitative studies lack rigour and authenticity because they rely on perceived rather than authoritative information was a consideration during this study. Measuring news diffusion using a qualitative method would have been difficult and immeasurable because of the lack of a rigorous qualitative scale. The NodeXL software saved the day by helping to access individual news sharing and diffusion activities of online news audiences within their personal networks via the Twitter network. Traditional or quantitative studies are known to follow validity and

reliability functions which are often standardised rather than perceptive. Additionally, by calculating the matrices of betweenness centrality and modularity using the Louvain method, the essential rigour required was compensated for.

Finally, because qualitative researchers study phenomena from their own point of view or through the eyes of people, their studies are often criticised as lacking essential validity. To overcome this weakness, the qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews were systematically handled to ensure rigour and minimise bias from both the researcher and participants. The researcher sought official permission from all the institutions studied and additional permission was sought from individual participants. All the participants were made to complete informed consent forms to confirm their voluntary participation in the study, upholding a code of ethics and principles that incorporates respect for human dignity and justice in research. Each interview session was audio-tape recorded. The audio recordings were listened to several times to ensure familiarity with the contents, which were then transcribed. The transcripts were sent back to the respondents to ensure factual accuracy before various themes and sub-themes were generated. The results of the report were communicated correctly without any bias by using verbatim quotes. Most importantly, the researcher acknowledged all sources consulted by means of complete referencing, both in-text and at the end of the thesis.

## **6.10 Summary**

This chapter has given a detailed explication of the research processes, methods and strategies adopted to execute this study. The mixed-methods research paradigm

executed from a qualitative and interpretive perspective was found to be a suitable approach for the study. This was justified on the merit that while both quantitative and qualitative methodologies took centre-stage in data collection and analysis, interpretation was largely qualitative using an interpretive viewpoint. Quantitative methods, thus, assumed an 'auxiliary' or supportive role to plot audiences' activities in news diffusion on the Twitter social media network.

The data collection methods adopted for this study included quantitative graphical representations of media audiences' news diffusion activities through tweets, retweets and mentions on Twitter via the NodeXL software. This helped to measure the extent of diffusion of links to news stories and headlines in the personal network of media audiences. This was followed by semi-structured interviews of online news editors, social media managers and curators of the sampled online news media outlets.

Mixed-methods studies, like all others whether solely qualitative or quantitative, need to be conducted with the issues of quality and rigour in mind. Because this mixed-methods study was qualitatively driven, the quality criteria adopted were largely qualitative. Measures to ensure that the four-criterion construct of trustworthiness and authenticity, that is, credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability, were outlined. Strategies to ensure the validity and credibility of quantitative data collected were also discussed.

The final section of this chapter discussed the researcher's role in carrying out this study. Credibility in qualitatively-driven mixed-methods research is enhanced when

the researcher does not introduce bias into both data collection and analysis. As much as practicable, the researcher's prejudice was minimised in order to achieve objectivity, which would make the findings representative of the population. The findings can, therefore, be considered as a valid and credible normative Ghanaian contextual contribution to gatekeeping literature.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter offers a mixed-methods presentation of the data gathered for the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative perspectives. The chapter further details the steps undertaken in analysing the data from the different sources and how they helped to answer the research questions posed in Chapter One.

The purpose of this study was to unearth how media outlets use their gatekeeping activities to build the brand image, identity and personality of their outlets. As well as, how the brand built helps to diffuse their news stories on digital platforms. This was necessary because, though online digital platforms are characterised by ease of entry of content producers and switching by audiences, literature suggests that traditional media outlets with an online presence retain some amount of credibility from their parent traditional media sources. Thus, they command enormous following compared with solely online digital news outlets. Also, the news of traditional media on digital platforms is highly propagated by their audiences compared with solely online news outlets. To ascertain this position, the study explored how the normative gatekeeping roles and functions performed by traditional media gatekeepers on their online digital brand extensions and associated social media platforms compared to those performed by online news media gatekeepers on their websites and associated social media platforms. Furthermore, the study explored how the gatekeeping function performed contributed to building brand personality to distinguish these online digital news

outlets. Finally, by comparing the social media accounts (Twitter) of three radio online digital brand extensions and three stand-alone online digital news channels without traditional media affiliation in Ghana for one month, the study assessed the extent to which audiences aid the diffusion of the news stories of online digital media brands beyond what the outlets achieve themselves.

The above objectives were achieved by collecting both quantitative and qualitative data using suitable data collection tools as indicated below.

- First, there was quantitative statistical network visualisation of the Twitter activities of audiences within the Twitter network of the six purposively sampled online digital news outlets using the NodeXL software. A total of 24 graphs were generated, one for each week of the one-month study period, for each of the six news outlets.
- The final source of data was derived from semi-structured interviews with the online news editors, social media managers and social media curators of the six online digital news outlets. In all, there were 15 interviews, instead of 18. This was because two of the solely online digital news outlets did not have social media curators and a social media manager.

## **7.2 Data presentation**

This section, and those that follow in this chapter, present the findings of the study in the chronological order in which the study was conducted. It first presents data from the graphical representation of audiences' activities within the NodeXL software.

The recorded semi-structured interviews were then considered. The data sources

engaged in this study showed the different angles to the problem being studied. Additionally, the systematic processes adopted in analysing the data helped determine how each data source fitted into the bigger picture. Table 7.1 summarises the data sources engaged in and the purposes they served in the study.

**Table 7.1: Data sets analysed in the study**

Data sources/instruments	Essence in the study
<p><b>Data source 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Graphical representation of audience interaction with online digital news outlets on Twitter through network visualisation.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To explore the news diffusion and propagation activities of audiences within the Twitter network of the online digital news outlets.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Data source 2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Semi-structured interviews</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploring what went into gatekeeping decisions for news stories.</li> <li>• Exploring how media outlets used gatekeeping for brand personality building.</li> <li>• Deriving meaning for the graphical representations of the audiences' activities regarding news diffusion for each of the six online digital news media outlets.</li> </ul>

Data presentation in this study was done systematically by considering each data source individually, inductively and on its own merit before interpretation could be done. Additionally, because this mixed-methods study was approached qualitatively, the quantitative analysis was done first so that the qualitative analysis could follow and give meaning to the quantitative data.

The next section discusses the various processes and procedures engaged in data analysis and subsequently presents the data.



### ***7.2.1 Data analysis and presentation of graphical network visualisation of audience activities within the Twitter network of sampled online digital news platforms using the NodeXL software***

The first data set collected for this study was graphical representations of audience activities on the Twitter social media network in the form of network visualisation using the NodeXL software. This was done for each of the six online digital news brands being studied over a one-month period. This process preceded the semi-structured interview sessions because the researcher wanted to reduce bias and interference on the part of the online news media brands. This meant generating a graph for each news organisation per week for four weeks (one month), resulting in 24 graphs being generated. This interval was not researcher-determined, but rather Twitter allows for access to information in intervals of 7-days. This helped to capture every activity undertaken within the network without producing duplicates. The information captured comprised publicly available data on the Twitter handles of the six online digital news brands.

To start, the researcher registered on the Twitter network and followed all six online digital news brands to have access to their Twitter Application Programming Interface (API). This then gave the researcher access to the tweets, retweets, hashtags and mentions within each network. The researcher further purchased a NodeXL licence from the Social Media Research Foundation.

Once the NodeXL interface was opened, the researcher imported data from the Twitter search network by inputting the Twitter handles of the six online digital news brands individually to generate six different data sets with unique graphs each week. After

generating simple graphs, the researcher imported the standard NodeXL template by clicking on the option “Twitter User Network 01- standard NodeXL Options”. The researcher then clicked on the Automate icon on the NodeXL menu bar. This then showed the ‘automate’ dialogue box. The researcher then checked all the options in the dialogue box and pressed on the ‘run’ button to execute the automated calculation of the matrices for each graph for all the news organisation. Thus, resulting in the network visualisation of user and news diffusion activities in each handle of the various news organisations. The actions automated by the researcher included the options to:

- Count and merge duplicate edges
- Group by cluster
- Graph matrices
- Autofill columns
- Sub-graph images
- Show graph
- Save workbook to a new file if it has never been saved
- Save image to file

Having done these, the software generated the graphs with the attendant matrices. The researcher then took screen shots of the complex network visualisations that showed user positions and relationships in the network for inclusion into the thesis. This process was undertaken for each online news brand each week. Each graph showed the relationship between all audiences and how they interacted with the online digital brand information posted on Twitter. Various quantitative network matrices analyses like the in-degree, out-degree, betweenness centrality, closeness centrality,


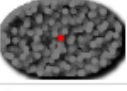





Eigenvector centrality, page rank and clustering co-efficient were performed, in addition to other graph characteristics. These quantitative network matrices of Twitter data made it possible to “systematically dissect the social world, creating a basis on which to compare networks, track changes in a network over time, and determine the relative position of individuals and clusters within a network” (Hansen, Shneiderman & Smith 2011:39).

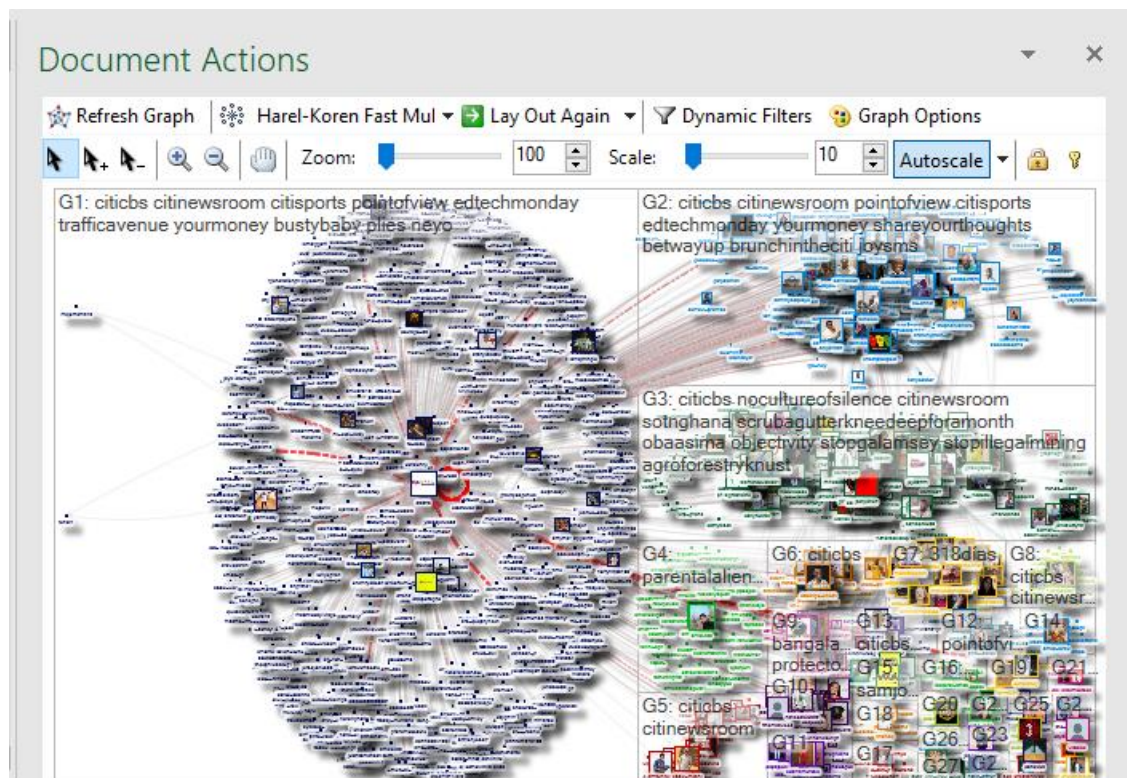
At the end of the period, four data sets were produced for each online news platform for the one-month period, with their related graphs generated. In all, 24 data sets were generated and each data set was used to plot a graph of user-activities, thus, producing 24 distinct graphs. Data collection was undertaken for the period between 15<sup>th</sup> April, 2021 and 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2021.

The next sub-sections present the data for each online digital news brand extension. Each screenshot was split into two for clarity and elaborate presentation of audience activities.


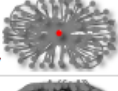
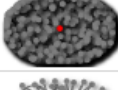
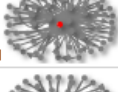
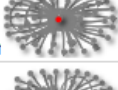
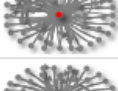

#### *7.2.1.1 Citifmonline.com*

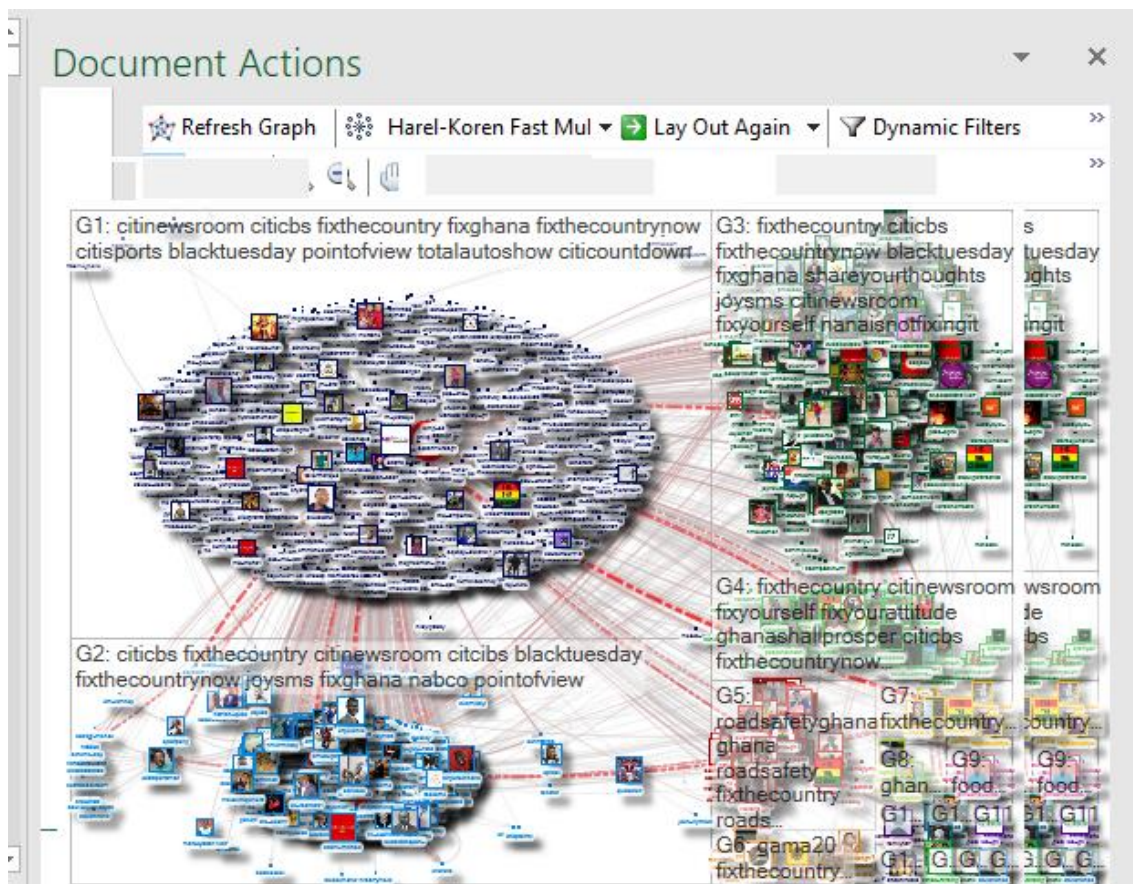
The handle used in generating the graph for *citifmonline.com* was @Citi973. The graphs, as depicted in Figure 7.1 to Figure 7.4, show the discussion groups created as a result of different story links posted by *citifmonline.com* on their Twitter handle, as well as the tweets, retweets, mentions and replies that show news diffusion activities of their audiences.

	A	B	S	T	U	V	W	X
1			Graph Metrics					
2	Vertex	Subgraph	Degree	In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality
3	_conder			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.000
4	citi973			1195	19	1968988.759	0.001	0.000
5	kwabena			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.000
6	theophilus			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.000
7	_waters			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.000
8	ebendonk			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.000
9	jayl_all			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.000



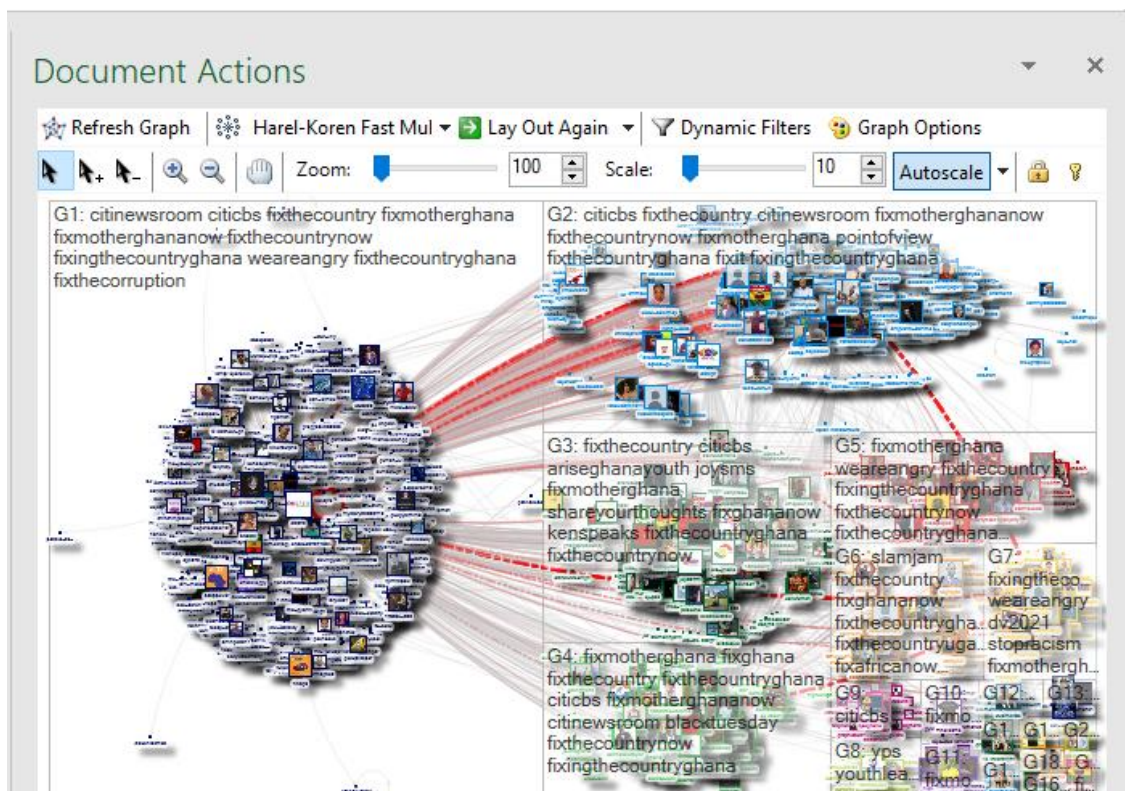
**Figure 7.1** First graphical representation of audience news diffusion activities within the Twitter social media interface generated for citifmonline.com (Author generated, April 2021).

	A	B	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y
1			Graph Metrics						
2	Vertex	Subgraph	Degree	In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality	PageRank
3	david_do			0	11	400.952	0.000	0.001	1.3
4	joynewsor			70	0	5184.833	0.000	0.002	8.4
5	citi973			1335	23	2367294.828	0.001	0.024	312.7
6	peacefmo			60	0	1731.294	0.000	0.001	6.8
7	alankyeret			48	0	229.403	0.000	0.001	5.2
8	opofofo			48	0	229.403	0.000	0.001	5.2
9	royaltcafe			48	0	229.403	0.000	0.001	5.2



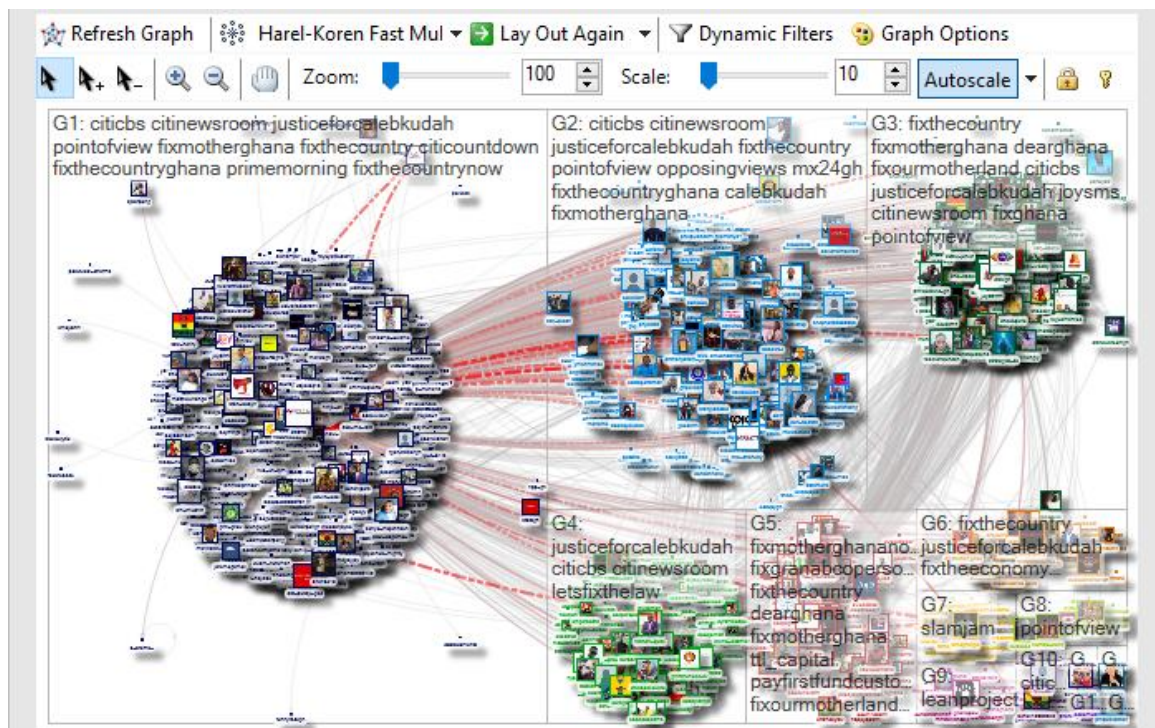
**Figure 7.2** Second graphical representation of audience news diffusion activities within the Twitter social media interface generated for citifmonline.com (Author generated, April 2021).

	A	B	S	T	U	V	W	X
1			Graph Metrics					
2	Vertex	Subgraph	Degree	In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality
3	omotund6			1	2	0.000	0.000	0.000
4	citi973			1265	20	2191695.539	0.001	0.000
5	dziedzorm			4	1	3.667	0.000	0.000
6	ghanasoci			1	3	0.667	0.000	0.000
7	exploregh			1	1	0.000	0.000	0.000
8	rzkshamsu			0	2	0.000	0.000	0.000
9	asfitnetwo			1	14	24423.621	0.000	0.000



**Figure 7.3 Third graphical representation of audience news diffusion activities within the Twitter social media interface generated for citifmonline.com (Author generated, May 2021).**

	A	B	S	T	U	V	W	X
1	Graph Metrics							
2	Vertex	Subgraph	Degree	In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality
3	young_k			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.000
4	citi973			1342	21	2085640.669	0.001	0.000
5	perezewo			1	3	0.000	0.000	0.000
6	aka_me_la			2	2	2.000	0.000	0.000
7	asemhmm			2	4	2.000	0.000	0.000
8	naapapsor			0	2	0.000	0.000	0.000
9	bawunomi			1	1	0.000	0.000	0.000



**Figure 7.4** Fourth graphical representation of audience news diffusion activities within the Twitter social media interface generated for citifmonline.com (Author generated, May 2021).

**Table 7.2 Analysis of network matrices used to generate various graphs (Figure 7.1 to Figure 7.4 above) for citifmonline.com**

Graph Matrices/ characteristics	First network matrices statistics (Figure 7.1)	Second network matrices statistics (Figure 7.2)	Third network matrices statistics (Figure 7.3)	Fourth network matrices statistics (Figure 7.4)
No of groups/topics under discussion	34	16	20	14
Number of vertexes	1421	1596	1532	1509
Unique edges	2242	3264	3667	4777
Edges with duplicates	1566	2494	2229	2296
Number of edge types	5	5	5	5
Total edges	3808	5758	5896	7073
Replies to	714	993	914	812
Mentions in retweet	673	1075	2046	3199
Mentions	981	2553	1643	1616
Retweets	1334	1013	1198	1333
Tweets	106	124	95	113
Self loop	115	140	114	122
Reciprocated vertex pair ratio	0.026569118	0.021319797	0.013377926	0.010875576
Reciprocated edges ratio	0.051762941	0.041749503	0.02640264	0.021517141
Connected components	1	1	1	1
Single-vertex connected components	0	0	0	0



Maximum vertexes in a connected component	1421	1596	1532	1509
Maximum edges in a connected component	3808	5758	5896	7073
Maximum geodesic distance (diameter)	4	4	4	4
Average geodesic distance	2.302232	2.296628	2.321632	2.19298
Graph density	0.001321228	0.001580754	0.001808576	0.002409944
Modularity	0.4351	0.411735	0.439585	0.407421
In-degree				
Maximum in-degree	1195	1335	1265	1342
Minimum in-degree	0	0	0	0
Average in-degree	1.882	2.543	2.790	3.651
Median in-degree	0.00	0.000	0.000	0.000
Out-degree				
Maximum out-degree	46	24	39	25
Minimum out-degree	0	0	0	0
Average out-degree	1.882	2.543	2.790	3.651
Median out-degree	1.000	1.000	1.000	2.000
Betweenness Centrality				
Maximum betweenness centrality	1968988.759	2367294.828	2191695.539	2085640.669
Minimum betweenness centrality	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Average betweenness centrality	1851.472	2070.419	2025.740	1801.207

Median betweenness centrality	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Closeness Centrality				
Maximum closeness centrality	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001
Minimum closeness centrality	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Average closeness centrality	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Median closeness centrality	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Eigenvector Centrality				
Maximum Eigenvector Centrality	0.027	0.024	0.023	0.018
Minimum Eigenvector Centrality	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Average Eigenvector Centrality	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001
Median Eigenvector Centrality	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.000
Page Rank				
Maximum Page Rank	350.065	312.782	292.292	239.319
Minimum Page Rank	0.311	0.292	0.258	0.260
Average Page Rank	1.000	1.000	1.000	0.271
Median Page Rank	0.500	0.516	0.489	0.167
Clustering Co-efficient				

Maximum Clustering Co-efficient	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Minimum Clustering Co-efficient	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Average Clustering Co-efficient	0.222	0.308	0.246	0.271
Median Clustering Co-efficient	0.000	0.125	0.071	0.167

As evident in Table 7.2, there are 34 discussion groups in Figure 7.1 indicating that within the first week of the study period, audiences were interacting with 34 stories, links, videos or images on @Citi973. There were 1421 vertexes, indicating 1421 individuals who were connected to diffusing the various news stories. The total number of edges, which is 3808, depicts the number and relationship between activities these 1421 audiences undertook, which resulted in 106 tweets, 1334 retweets, 714 replies, 673 mentions in retweets, 981 mentions and 115 self loops (new tweets, retweets, replies and mentions referring to ones on tweets, retweets, replies and mentions). Various matrixes were calculated to help ascertain graph characteristics. The matrix of in-degree, which measures the number of links or edges directed to each individual when they tweet, retweet, reply or mention any information, was calculated. For the first graph, a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 1195 was achieved. The matrix of out-degree measures the number of links or edges sent out by individuals when they are diffusing news stories or when they tweet, retweet, reply or mention any information. For the first graph, a range of 0 minimum and 46 maximum was obtained.

Betweenness centrality is a measure of “how often a given vertex lies on the shortest path between two other vertices” or “of how much removing a person would disrupt

the connections between other people in the network (Hansen, Shneiderman & Smith 2011:40). There was a measure of 1968988.759 maximum and 0.000 minimum, indicating a high level of betweenness and the importance of such individuals in the network. The closeness centrality is a measure of “the average distance between a vertex and every other vertex in the network” (Hansen, Shneiderman & Smith 2011:41). For this first graph, it measured 0.001 as maximum and 0.000. It shows that the connections are very close for the total graph. The Eigenvector centrality is a measure of how connected other connections of the primary vertex are (Hansen, Shneiderman & Smith 2011:41). In this graph, it shows a maximum of 0.027 and a minimum of 0.000. Clustering co-efficient is a measure of “how closely connected each user’s connections are connected to one another” (Pew [sa]:13). On the left side of the graph visualisation above (Figure 7.1), there is a sub-graph in the second column showing the closeness or dispersion of the immediate connections or friends in the network of each user. It shows each user’s activity in the network and contribution to news diffusion. A very popular strategy by which news organisations diffuse news is to send tweets in a network with a high connectivity where audiences also share it in their personal networks. Such a densely connected network of friends has high Eigenvector value. The aggregate of these connections produced a maximum value of 1.000 and a minimum value of 0.000 in this graph. The graph had a density of 0.001321228 and a graph modularity of 0.4351.

From Table 7.2, there are 16 discussion groups in Figure 7.2 indicating that, within the second week of the study period, audiences were interacting with 16 stories, links, videos or images on @Citi973. There were 1596 vertexes, indicating 1596 individuals who were connected to and diffusing the various news stories on @Citi973. The total

number of edges, which is 5758, depict the number and relationship between activities that audiences undertook which resulted in 124 tweets, 1013 retweets, 993 replies, 1075 mentions in retweets, 2553 mentions and 140 self loops. For the second graph, a range of 0 minimum and 1335 maximum was achieved for in-degree. A range of 0 minimum and 24 maximum for out-degree was obtained. The betweenness centrality measure was 2367294.828 as maximum and 0.000 as minimum. There was a closeness centrality measure of a maximum of 0.001 and a minimum of 0.000. The Eigenvector centrality measure was 0.024 as a maximum value and 0.000 as a minimum value. There were clustering co-efficient figures of 1.000 maximum and 0.000 minimum. The graph had a density of 0.001580754 and a graph modularity of 0.411735.

For the third graph generated for @Citi973, as indicated in the values for Figure 7.3 on Table 7.2, there are 20 discussion groups. This indicates that within the third week of the study period, audiences were interacting with 20 stories, links, videos or images on @Citi973. There were 1532 vertexes, indicating 1532 individuals who were connected to and diffusing the various news stories on @Citi973. The total number of edges, which is 5896, depict the number and relationship between activities that audiences undertook which resulted in 95 tweets, 1198 retweets, 914 replies, 2046 mentions in retweets, 1643 mentions and 114 self loops. For the third graph, a range of 0 minimum and 1265 maximum was achieved for in-degree. A range of 0 minimum and 39 maximum for out-degree was obtained. A betweenness centrality measure of 2191695.539 maximum and 0.000 minimum was obtained. There was a closeness centrality measure of a maximum of 0.001 and a minimum of 0.000. The Eigenvector centrality measure was 0.023 as a maximum value and 0.000 as a minimum value.


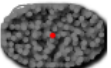





There were clustering co-efficient figures of 1.000 maximum and 0.000 minimum. The graph had a density of 0.001808576 and a graph modularity of 0.439585.

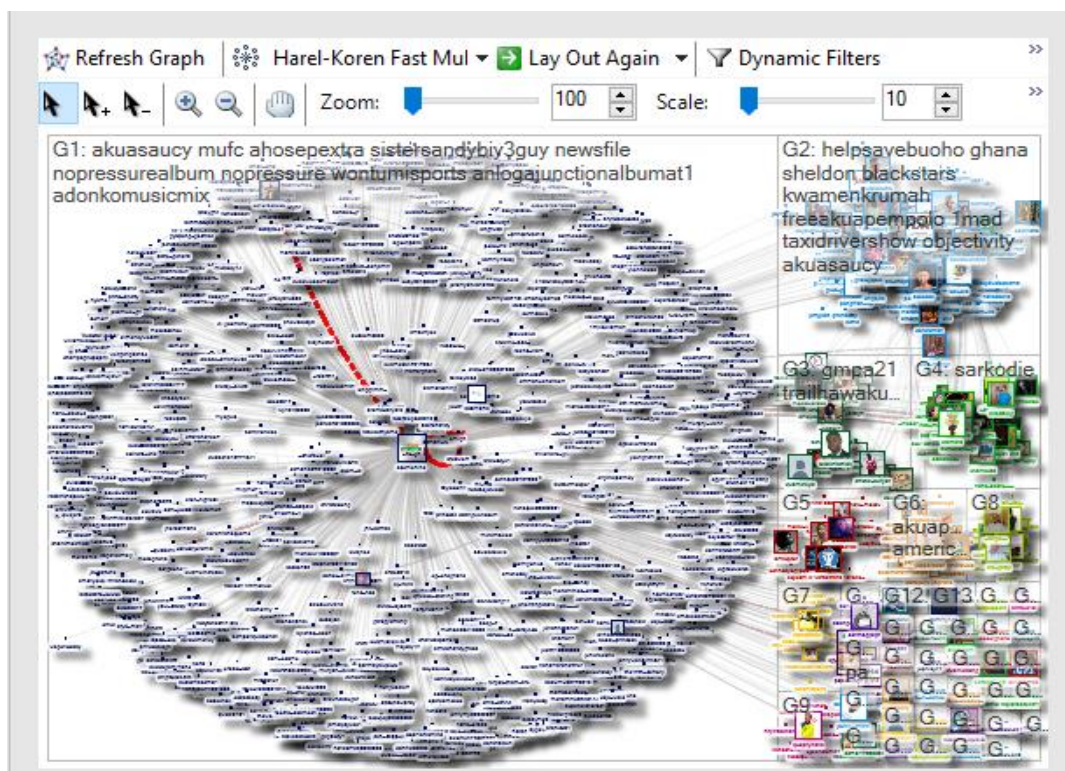
In the final week of the study, the graph generated for @Citi973, as indicated in the values for Figure 7.4 on Table 7.2, showed there were 14 discussion groups. Thus, indicating that within the fourth week of the study period, audiences were interacting with 14 stories, links, videos or images on @Citi973. There were 1509 vertexes, indicating 1509 individuals who were connected to and diffusing the various news stories. The total number of edges, which is 7073, depict the number and relationship between activities the audiences undertook which resulted in 113 tweets, 1333 retweets, 812 replies, 3199 mentions in retweets, 1616 mentions and 122 self loops. For the final graph, a range of 1342 maximum and 0 minimum was achieved for in-degree. A range of 0 minimum and 25 maximum for out-degree was recorded. A betweenness centrality measure of 2085640.669 maximum and 0.000 minimum was recorded. There was a closeness centrality measure of a maximum of 0.001 and a minimum of 0.000 and Eigenvector centrality measure of 0.018 as a maximum value and 0.000 as a minimum value. There were clustering co-efficient figures of 1.000 maximum and 0.000 minimum. The graph had a density of 0.002409944 and a graph modularity of 0.407421.

### 7.2.1.2 *Myjoyonline.com*

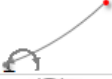
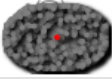





The handle used in generating the graph for *myjoyonline.com* was @joy997fm. The graphs, as depicted in Figure 7.5 to Figure 7.8, show the discussion groups created as a result of different story links posted by *myjoyonline.com* on their Twitter handle.

As well as the tweets, retweets, mentions and replies that show news diffusion activities amongst their audiences.

	A	B	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y
1			Graph Metrics						
2	Vertex	Subgraph	Degree	In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality	PageRank
3	eoboat1			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.4
4	adomonlir			1078	1	1564765.100	0.001	0.028	421.7
5	reckon137			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.4
6	omankyea			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.4
7	adzaka_be			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.4
8	nawarufus			0	2	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.8
9	lindadorgt			1	1	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.8



**Figure 7.5** First graphical representation of audience news diffusion activities within the Twitter social media interface generated for myjoyonline.com (Author generated, April 2021).

	A	B	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y
1			Graph Metrics						
2	Vertex	Subgraph	Degree	In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality	PageRank
3	vawulenc			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.466
4	adomnlin			1169	1	1887195.063	0.001	0.027	434.437
5	smallkind			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.466
6	legendary			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.466
7	mauel402			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.466
8	abigiejoe1			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.466
9	gandalft			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.466

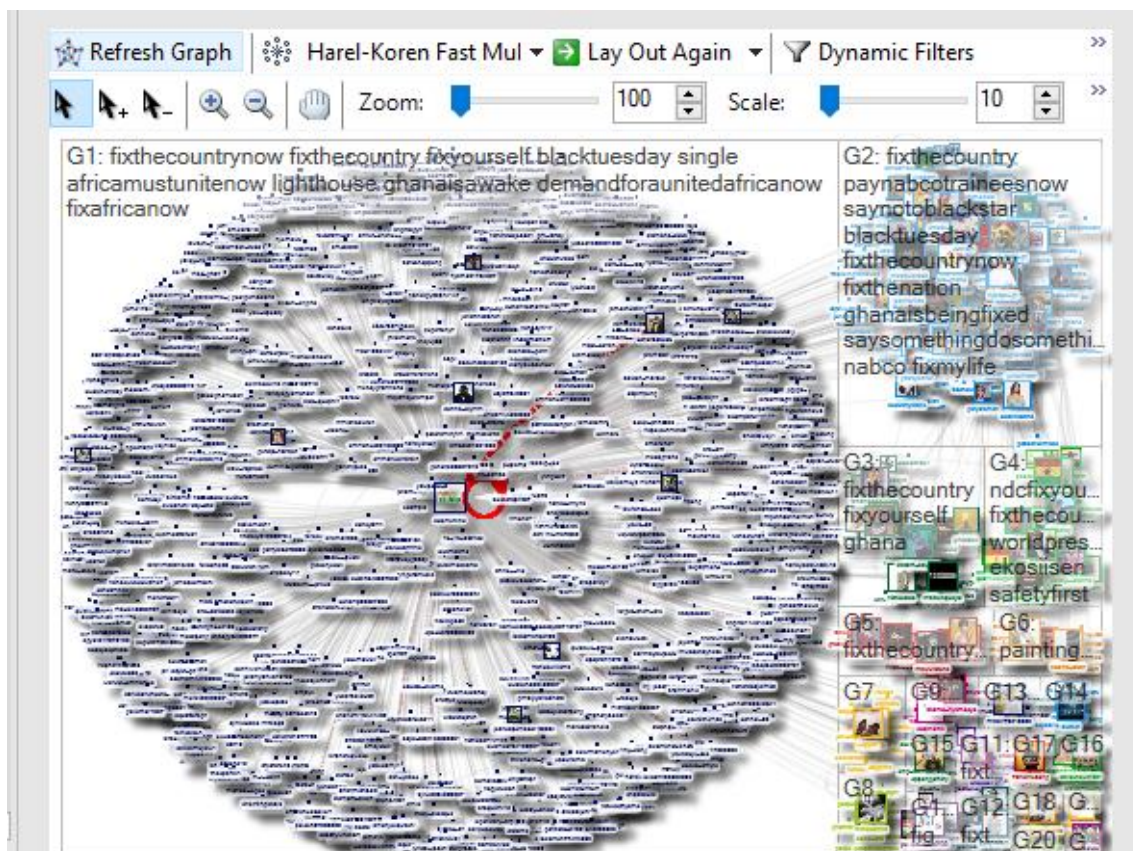
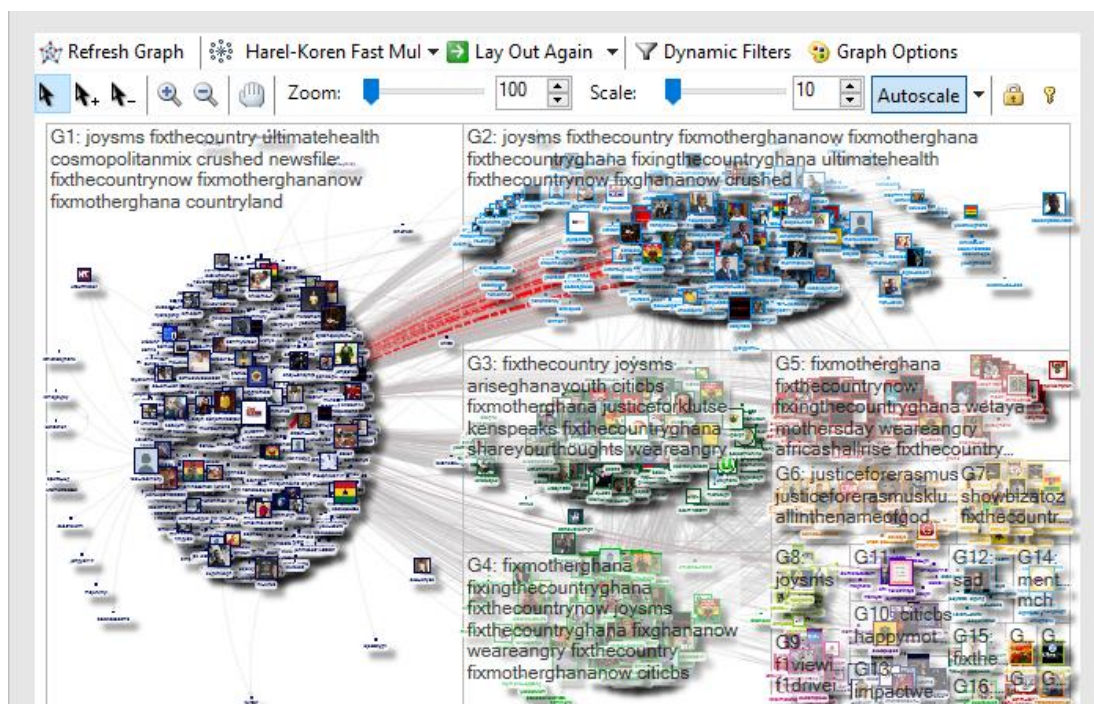



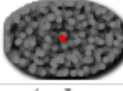




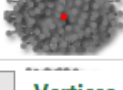
Figure 7.6 Second graphical representation of audience news diffusion activities within the Twitter social media interface generated for myjoyonline.com (Author generated, April 2021).



	A	B	S	T	U	V	W	X
1			Graph Metrics					
2	Vertex	Subgraph	Degree	In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality
3	maamezzz			0	14	589.555	0.000	0.
4	3fm_927			34	0	76.593	0.000	0.
5	ghanadaily			34	0	76.593	0.000	0.
6	ghananew			36	0	176.216	0.000	0.
7	joy997fm			1061	123	1581767.972	0.001	0.
8	joyfmnew			36	0	145.995	0.000	0.
9	cnafrica			36	0	140.134	0.000	0.



**Figure 7.7 Third graphical representation of audience news diffusion activities within the Twitter social media interface generated for myjoyonline.com (Author generated, May 2021).**

	A	B	S	T	U	V	W	X
1	Graph Metrics							
2	Vertex	Subgraph	Degree	In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality
3	ernestofo			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.000
4	joy997fm			1296	107	2475233.821	0.001	0.000
5	everybody			0	9	2989.405	0.000	0.000
6	thegbcgha			2	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
7	nabcogov			1	8	2989.404771	0.000	0.000
8	adomonlir			6	0	37.997	0.000	0.000
9	citi973			181	1	25567.889	0.000	0.000

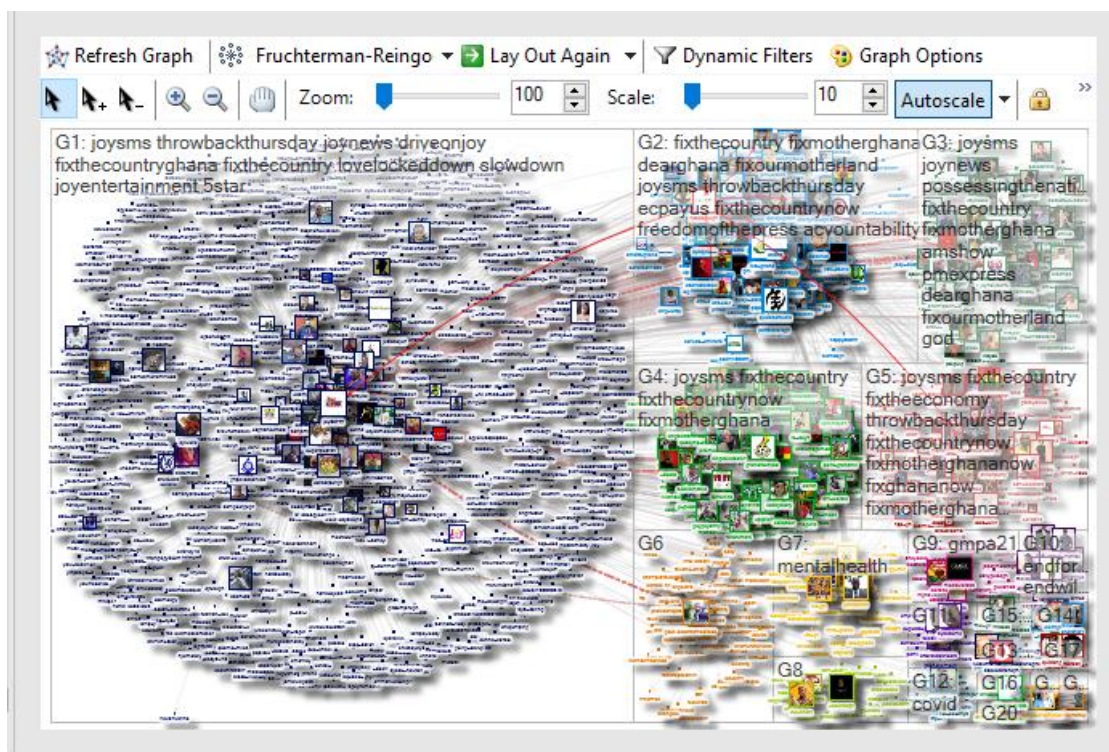


Figure 7.8 Fourth graphical representation of audience news diffusion activities within the Twitter social media interface generated for myjoyonline.com (Author generated, May 2021).

**Table 7.3 Analysis of network matrices used to generate various graphs for myjoyonline.com**

Graph Matrices/ Characteristics	First network matrices statistics (Figure 7.5)	Second network matrices statistics (Figure 7.6)	Third network matrices statistics (Figure 7.7)	Fourth network matrices statistics (Figure 7.8)
No of groups/topics under discussion	41	21	20	21
Number of vertexes	1259	1386	1299	1607
Unique edges	1357	1666	4150	3880
Edges with duplicates	1923	1780	2320	2279
Number of edge types	5	5	5	5
Total edges	3280	3446	6470	6159
Replies to	797	954	938	784
Mentions in retweet	372	407	2581	2045
Mentions	775	893	1469	1769
Retweets	981	837	938	1366
Tweets	355	355	149	196
Self loop	365	366	159	201
Reciprocated vertex pair ratio	0.021713515	0.010204082	0.034965035	0.03074805
Reciprocated edges ratio	0.042504308	0.02020202	0.067567568	0.059661621
Connected components	1	1	1	1
Single-vertex connected components	0	0	0	0
Maximum vertexes in a connected component	1259	1386	1299	1607

Maximum edges in a connected component	3250	3446	6470	6159
Maximum geodesic distance (diameter)	4	4	4	4
Average geodesic distance	2.279635	2.305059	2.300853	2.33437
Graph density	0.00109924	0.001083032	0.002808845	0.001740517
Modularity	0.353107	0.402015	0.429753	0.493584
In-degree				
Maximum in-degree	1078	1169	1061	1296
Minimum in-degree	0	0	0	0
Average in-degree	1.388	1.517	3.674	2.816
Median in-degree	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Out-degree				
Maximum out-degree	23	24	123	107
Minimum out-degree	0	0	0	0
Average out-degree	1.388	1.517	3.674	2.816
Median out-degree	1.000	1.000	2.000	1.000
Betweenness Centrality				
Maximum betweenness centrality	1564765.100	1887195.063	1581767.972	2475233.821
Minimum betweenness centrality	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Average betweenness centrality	1612.060	1809.812	1690.808	2145.333
Median betweenness centrality	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Closeness Centrality				

Maximum closeness centrality	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001
Minimum closeness centrality	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Average closeness centrality	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Median closeness centrality	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000
Eigenvector Centrality				
Maximum Eigenvector Centrality	0.028	0.027	0.023	0.023
Minimum Eigenvector Centrality	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Average Eigenvector Centrality	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001
Median Eigenvector Centrality	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001
Page Rank				
Maximum Page Rank	421.715	434.437	195.026	300.996
Minimum Page Rank	0.338	0.330	0.263	0.267
Average Page Rank	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Median Page Rank	0.483	0.466	0.529	0.508
Clustering Co-efficient				
Maximum clustering co-efficient	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Minimum clustering co-efficient	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Average clustering co-efficient	0.074	0.075	0.264	0.211

Median clustering co-efficient	0.000	0.000	0.170	0.018
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Graph matrices for *myjoyonline.com*, as generated from the Twitter handle @joy997fm, are summarised in Table 7.3 for the four weeks of the study period. Matrices of the individual graphs in Figure 7.5 to Figure 7.8 are distinctively shown in the columns labelled Figures 7.5 to 7.8 in the table. From Table 7.3 and reading from the column labelled Figure 7.5, it outlines the graph matrix for @joy997fm in the first week of the study period. There are 41 discussion groups, indicating that within the first week of the study period, audiences were interacting with 41 stories, links, videos or images on @joy997fm. There were 1259 vertexes, indicating 1259 individuals who were connected to and diffusing various news stories from the Twitter handle of myjoyonline.com. There were 3280 edges, which depict the number of activities and the relationship between activities that audiences undertook which resulted in 355 tweets, 981 retweets, 797 replies, 372 mentions in retweets, 775 mentions and 365 self loops. For the first graph, a range of 1078 (maximum) and 0 (minimum) for in-degree was recorded. A range of 23 (maximum) and 0 (minimum) for out-degree was achieved. A betweenness centrality measure of 0.000 (minimum) and 1564765.100 (maximum) was recorded. There was a closeness centrality measure of a minimum of 0.000 and a maximum of 0.001. The Eigenvector centrality measure was 0.000 as a minimum value and 0.028 as a maximum value. There were clustering co-efficient figures of 0.000 minimum and 1.000 maximum. The graph had a density of 0.00109924 and a graph modularity of 0.353107.

From Table 7.3, statistics for the second week of graphical representation are depicted

in the column showing Figure 7.6. Audiences were interacting with 21 stories, links, videos or images on @joy997fm. There were 1386 vertexes, indicating 1386 individuals who were connected to and diffusing news stories on the Twitter handle @joy997fm. The total number of edges, which is 3446, depict the number and relationship between activities that audiences undertook which resulted in 355 tweets, 837 retweets, 954 replies, 407 mentions in retweets, 893 mentions and 366 self loops. For the second graph, a range of 1169 maximum and 0 minimum was obtained for in-degree. A range of 24 maximum and 0 minimum was obtained for out-degree. A betweenness centrality measure of 0.000 minimum and 1887195.063 maximum was obtained. There was a closeness centrality measure of a minimum of 0.000 and a maximum of 0.001. The Eigenvector centrality measure was 0.000 as a minimum value and 0.027 as a maximum value. There were clustering co-efficient figures of 0.000 minimum and 1.000 maximum. The graph had a density of 0.01001083032 and a graph modularity of 0.402015.

Graph matrices for the third week of the study period for *myjoyonline.com* is shown in the column labelled Figure 7.7 on Table 7.3. There were 20 discussion groups, indicating that within the third week of the study period, audiences were interacting with 20 stories, links, videos or images on @joy997fm. There were 1299 vertexes, indicating 1299 individuals who were connected to and diffusing the various news stories on @joy997fm. The total number of edges, which is 6470, depict the number and relationship between activities the audiences undertook which resulted in 149 tweets, 9387 retweets, 938 replies, 2581 mentions in retweets, 1469 mentions and 159 self loops. For the third graph, the range achieved for in-degree was 0 minimum and 1061 maximum. A range of 0 minimum and 123 maximum for out-degree was


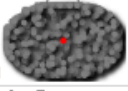





achieved. A betweenness centrality measure of 1581767.972 maximum and 0.000 minimum was obtained. There was a closeness centrality measure of a maximum of 0.001 and a minimum of 0.000. The Eigenvector centrality measure was 0.023 as a maximum value and 0.000 as a minimum value. There were clustering co-efficient figures of 1.000 maximum and 0.000 minimum. The graph had a density of 0.002808845 and a graph modularity of 0.429753.

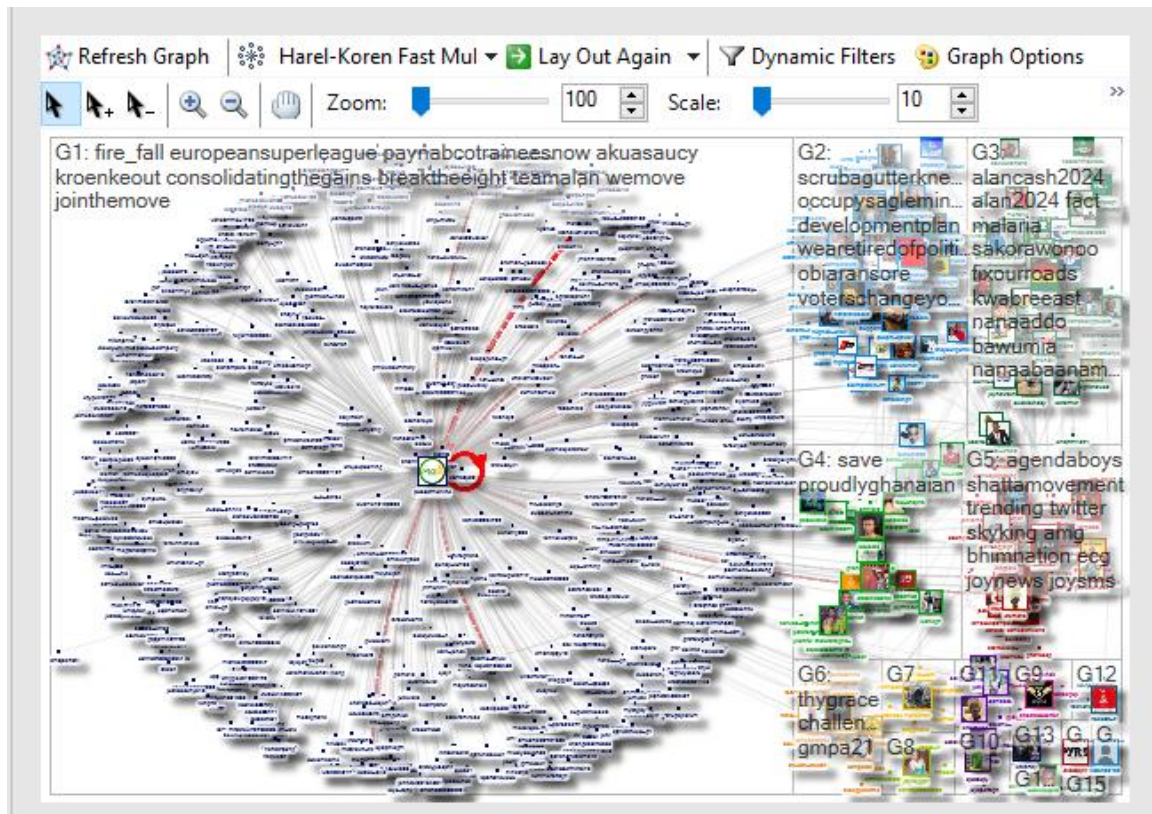
The matrices for the final graph generated in the fourth week of the study period for *myjoyonline.com* are indicated in the column labelled Figure 7.8 in Table 7.3. It shows 21 discussion groups, indicating that within the fourth week of the study period, audiences were interacting with 21 stories, links, videos or images on @joy997fm. There were 1607 vertexes, indicating 1607 individuals who were connected to and diffusing the various news stories on @joy997fm. The total number of edges, which is 6159, depict the number and relationship between activities that the audiences undertook which resulted in 196 tweets, 1366 retweets, 784 replies, 2045 mentions in retweets, 1769 mentions and 201 self loops. For the fourth graph, a range of 0 minimum and 1296 maximum was obtained for in-degree. A range of 0 minimum and 107 maximum for out-degree was achieved. A betweenness centrality measure of 2475233.821 maximum and 0.000 minimum was obtained. There was a closeness centrality measure of a maximum of 0.001 and a minimum of 0.000. The Eigenvector centrality measure was 0.023 as a maximum value and 0.000 as a minimum value. There were clustering co-efficient figures of 1.000 maximum and 0.000 minimum. The graph had a density of 0.001740517 and a graph modularity of 0.493584.



### 7.2.1.3 Peacefmonline.com

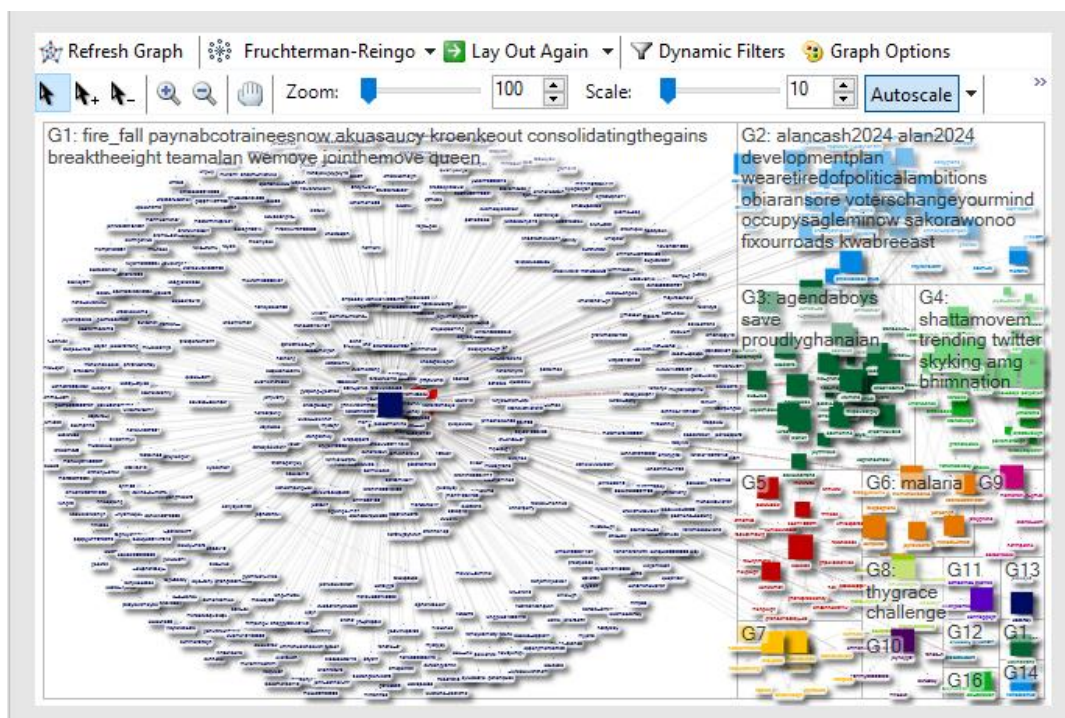
The handle used in generating the graph for *peacefmonline.com* was @peacefmonline. The graphs, as depicted in Figure 7.9 to Figure 7.12, show the discussion groups created as a result of different story links posted by *peacefmonline.com* on their Twitter handle and the tweets, retweets, mentions and replies that show news diffusion activities of their audiences.

	A	B	S	T	U	V	W	X	
1	Graph Metrics								
2	Vertex	Subgraph	Degree	In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality	PageRank
3	odat2021			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.001	
4	peacefmonline			736	1	849888.425	0.001	0.034	
5	mcbrown			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.001	
6	julswiafe			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.001	
7	nanaokuta			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.001	
8	nana_amo			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.001	
9	_ohemma			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.001	



**Figure 7.9** First graphical representation of audience news diffusion activities within the Twitter social media interface generated for peacefmonline.com (Author generated, April 2021).

	A	B	S	T	U	V	W	X
1			Graph Metrics					
2	Vertex	Subgraph	Degree	In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality
3	moseskob			0	1	0.000	0.001	0.00
4	peacefmo			511	1	409824.926	0.001	0.04
5	donmagg			0	5	3976.197	0.001	0.00
6	jonilarnet			1	0	0.000	0.000	0.00
7	sambahfle			1	0	0.000	0.000	0.00
8	dakingdon			1	0	0.000	0.000	0.00
9	adomonlir			12	0	715.130	0.001	0.00



**Figure 7.10** Second graphical representation of audience news diffusion activities within the Twitter social media interface generated for peacefmonline.com (Author generated, April 2021).

	A	B	S	T	U	V	W	X	
1			Graph Metrics						
2	Vertex	Subgraph	Degree	In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality	
3	favmalenu			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.001	
4	peacefmon			1262	1	2030315.411	0.001	0.022	
5	famponsal			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.001	
6	nyavorjoh			0	12	318.095	0.000	0.001	
7	gboakogh			61	0	332.879	0.000	0.002	
8	citi973			255	0	44509.129	0.000	0.009	
9	ameyaw11			180	18	13563.238	0.000	0.009	

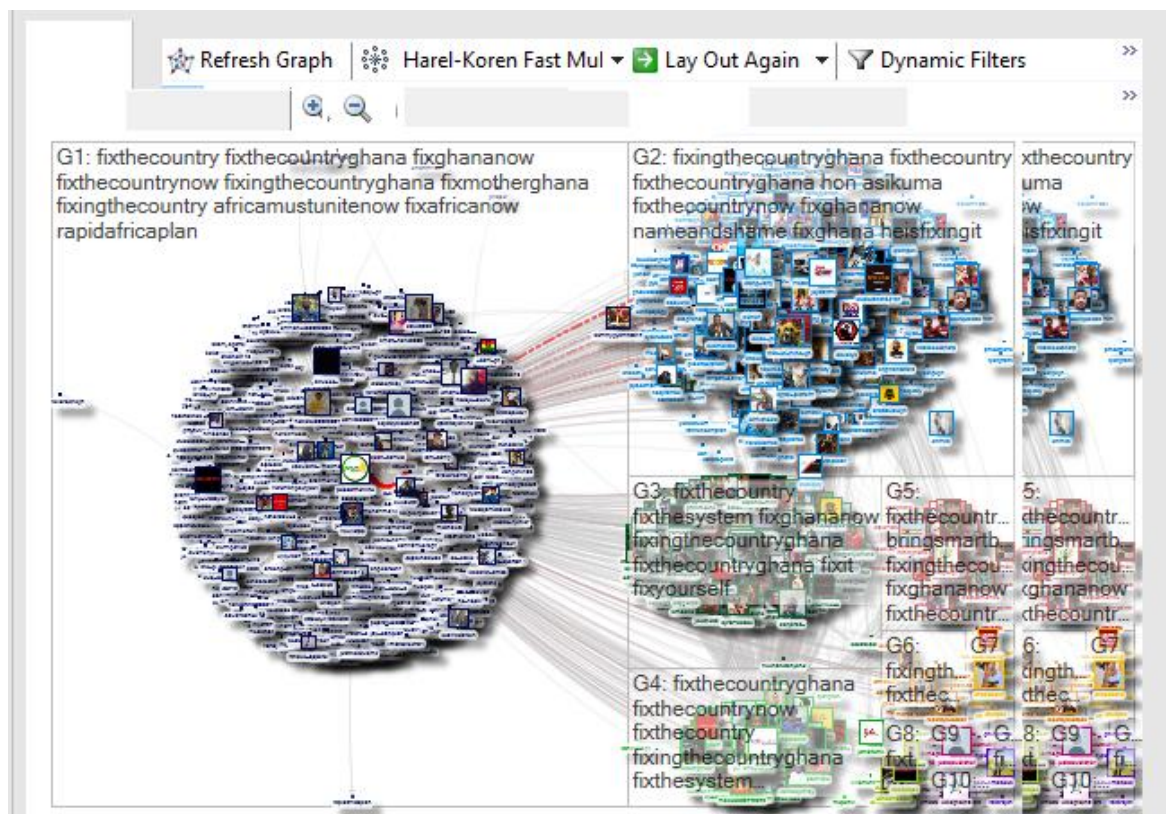


Figure 7.11 Third graphical representation of audience news diffusion activities within the Twitter social media interface generated for peacefmonline.com (Author generated, May 2021).

	A	B	S	T	U	V	W	X
1	Graph Metrics							
2	Vertex	Subgraph	Degree	In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality
3	razarkpint			0	2	0.000	0.000	0.001
4	jasmine_g			1	1	0.000	0.000	0.001
5	peacefmo			1227	1	2057955.006	0.001	0.026
6	apvrlfc1ir			0	1	0.000	0.000	0.001
7	habiblook			0	7	9378.578601	0.000	0.001
8	pmacman			1	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
9	ryofigrant			1	0	0.000	0.000	0.000

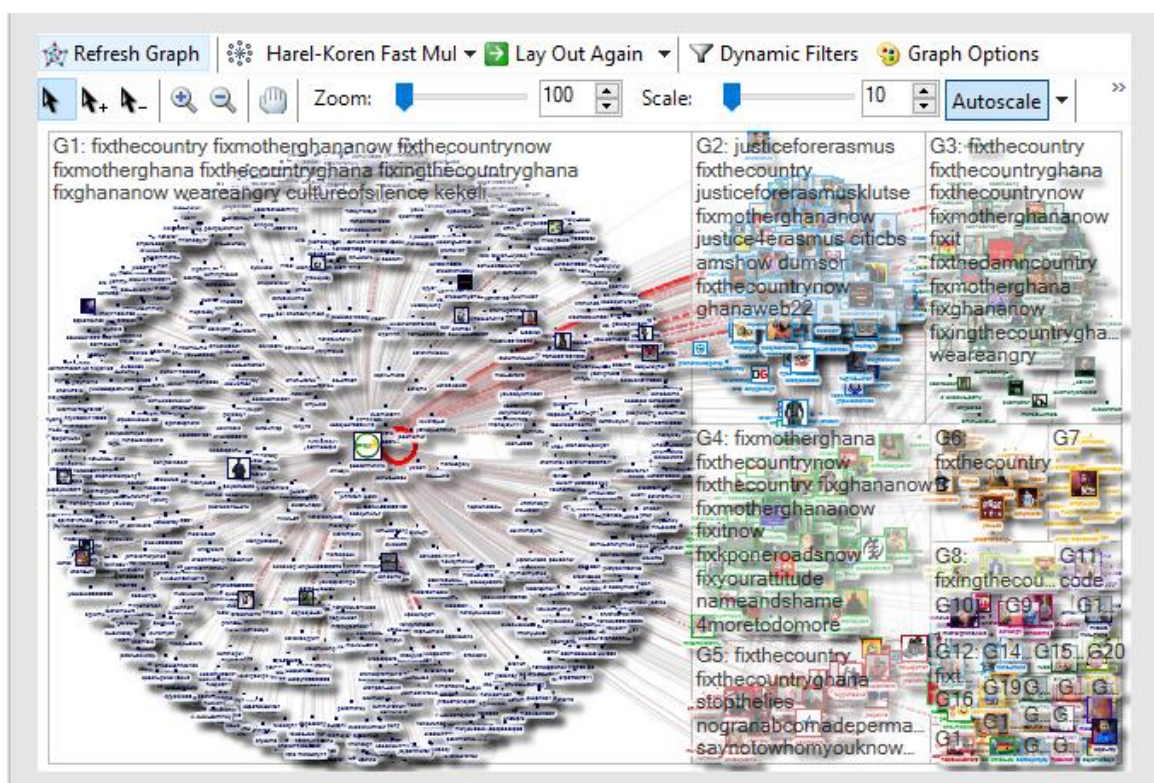


Figure 7.12 Fourth graphical representation of audience news diffusion activities within the Twitter social media interface generated for peacefmonline.com (Author generated, May 2021).

**Table 7.4 Analysis of network matrices used to generate various graphs for peacefmonline.com**

Graph Matrices/ Characteristics	First network metric statistics (Figure 7.9)	Second network metric statistics (Figure 7.10)	Third network metric statistics (Figure 7.11)	Fourth network metric statistics (Figure 7.12)
No of groups/topics under discussion	17	18	11	31
Number of vertexes	936	1319	1473	1455
Unique edges	1172	2825	3831	2423
Edges with duplicates	1718	2516	2453	2463
Number of edge types	5	5	5	5
Total edges	2890	5341	6284	4886
Retweet	855	901	874	861
Replies to	563	947	1153	1314
Mentions in retweet	361	1060	1626	1056
Mentions	579	1902	2272	1293
Tweets	353	531	359	365
Self loop	539	541	366	377
Reciprocated vertex pair ratio	0.0174705	0.012030075	0.016786517	0.030155979
Reciprocated edges ratio	0.034340659	0.023774146	0.021342819	0.058546433
Connected components	1	1	1	1
Single-vertex connected components	0	0	0	0
Maximum vertexes in a connected component	956	1319	1473	1455

Maximum edges in a connected component	2890	5341	6284	4886
Maximum geodesic distance (diameter)	4	4	4	4
Average geodesic distance	2.412103	2.376336	2.271812	2.301653
Graph density	0.001663696	0.001935641	0.002074478	0.001404822
Modularity	0.355331	0.419701	0.461191	0.384943
In-degree				
Maximum in-degree	756	1062	1262	1227
Minimum in-degree	0	0	0	0
Average in-degree	1.563	2.572	3.070	2.067
Median in-degree	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Out-degree				
Maximum out-degree	26	27	31	53
Minimum out-degree	0	0	0	0
Average out-degree	1.563	2.572	3.070	2.067
Median out-degree	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Betweenness Centrality				
Maximum betweenness centrality	849888.425	1654512.462	2030315.411	2057955.006
Minimum betweenness centrality	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Average betweenness centrality	1322.729	1816.387	1874.379	1894.906
Median betweenness centrality	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Closeness Centrality				

Maximum closeness centrality	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001
Minimum closeness centrality	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Average closeness centrality	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Median closeness centrality	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Eigenvector Centrality				
Maximum Eigenvector Centrality	0.034	0.026	0.002	0.026
Minimum Eigenvector Centrality	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Average Eigenvector Centrality	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001
Median Eigenvector Centrality	0.001	0.001	0.000	0.001
Page Rank				
Maximum Page Rank	275.077	279.247	297.623	363.725
Minimum Page Rank	0.296	0.260	0.248	0.270
Average Page Rank	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Median Page Rank	0.468	0.374	0.350	0.402
Clustering Co-efficient				
Maximum Clustering Co-efficient	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Minimum Clustering Co-efficient	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Average Clustering Co-efficient	0.081	0.091	0.102	0.135



Median Clustering Co-efficient	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
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Graph matrixes for *peacefmonline.com* are summarised in Table 7.4 for the four weeks of the study period. Matrixes of the individual graphs in Figure 7.9 to Figure 7.12 are peculiarly shown on the table. From Table 7.4, and reading from the column labelled Figure 7.9, it outlines the graph matrix for *peacefmonline.com* in the first week of the study period. There were 17 discussion groups indicating that within the first week of the study period, audiences were interacting with 17 stories, links, videos or images on @peacefmonline. There were 936 vertexes, indicating 936 individuals who were connected to the Twitter handle of *peacefmonline.com* and diffusing various news stories. There were 2890 edges, which depict the number of activities and the relationship between activities that audiences undertook, resulting in 353 tweets, 855 retweets, 563 replies, 361 mentions in retweets, 579 mentions and 539 self loops. For the first graph, a range of 756 (maximum) and 0 (minimum) for in-degree was recorded. A range of 26 (maximum) and 0 (minimum) for out-degree was achieved. A betweenness centrality measure of between 849888.425 (maximum) and 0.000 (minimum) was recorded. There was a closeness centrality measure of a minimum of 0.000 and a maximum of 0.001. The Eigenvector centrality measure was 0.000 as a minimum value and 0.034 as a maximum value. There were clustering co-efficient figures of 0.000 minimum and 1.000 maximum. The graph had a density of 0.001663696 and a graph modularity of 0.355331.

The column labelled Figure 7.10 on Table 7.4 outlines the statistics for the second week of graphical representation for *peacefmonline.com*. Audiences within that period

interacted with 18 stories, links, videos or images on the Twitter handle of *peacefmonline.com*. There were 1319 vertexes, indicating 1319 individuals who were connected to and diffusing the various news stories on the Twitter handle, @*peacefmonline*. The total number of edges, which is 5341, depict the number and relationship between activities these audiences undertook, which resulted in 531 tweets, 901 retweets, 947 replies, 1060 mentions in retweets, 1902 mentions and 541 self loops. For this second graph, a minimum of 0 and maximum of 1062 were attained for in-degree. A range of 0 minimum and 27 maximum were attained for out-degree. A betweenness centrality measure of 1654512.462 maximum and 0.000 minimum were attained. There was a closeness centrality measure of a maximum of 0.001 and a minimum of 0.000. The Eigenvector centrality measure was 0.026 as a maximum value and 0.000 as a minimum value. There were clustering co-efficient figures of 1.000 maximum and 0.000 minimum. The graph had a density of 0.001935641 and a graph modularity of 0.419701.

The graph matrix for the third week of the study period for *peacefmonline.com* is shown in the column labelled Figure 7.11 on Table 7.4. There were 11 discussion groups indicating that, within the third week of the study period, audiences interacted with 11 stories, links, videos or images on the Twitter handle of *peacefmonline.com*. There were 1473 vertexes, indicating 1473 individuals who were connected to and diffusing the various news stories. The total number of edges, which is 6284, depict the number and relationship between activities these 1473 audiences undertook which resulted in 359 tweets, 874 retweets, 1153 replies, 1626 mentions in retweets, 2272 mentions and 366 self loops. For the third graph, a range of 0 minimum and 1262 maximum was achieved for in-degree. A range of 0 minimum and 31 maximum for out-degree was

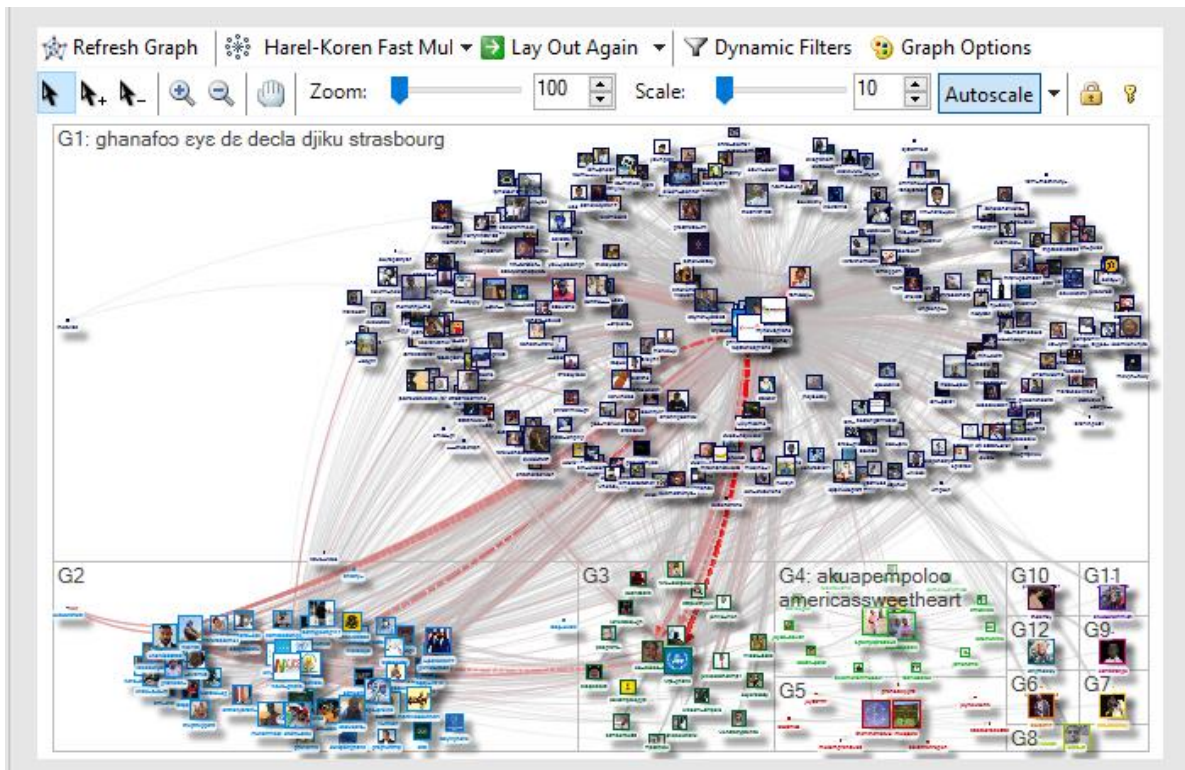
obtained. A betweenness centrality measure of 2030315.411 maximum and 0.000 minimum was obtained. There was a closeness centrality measure of a maximum of 0.001 and a minimum of 0.000. The Eigenvector centrality measure was 0.002 as a maximum value and 0.000 as a minimum value. There were clustering co-efficient figures of 1.000 maximum and 0.000 minimum. The graph had a density of 0.002074478 and a graph modularity of 0.461191.

In the final week of the study, the graph generated for *peacefmonline.com*, as indicated in the values for Figure 7.12 on Table 7.4, showed 31 discussion groups, indicating that within the fourth week of the study period, audiences were interacting with 31 stories, links, videos or images on @peacefmonline. There were 1455 vertexes, indicating 1455 individuals who were connected to and diffusing the various news stories on @peacefmonline. The total number of edges, which is 4886, depict the number and relationship between activities that audiences undertook which resulted in 365 tweets, 861 retweets, 1314 replies, 1056 mentions in retweets, 1293 mentions and 377 self loops. For the final graph, a range of 0 minimum and 1227 maximum for in-degree was obtained. A range of 0 minimum and 53 maximum for out-degree was obtained. A betweenness centrality measure of 2057955.006 maximum and 0.000 minimum was obtained. There was a closeness centrality measure of a maximum of 0.001 and a minimum of 0.000. The Eigenvector centrality measure was 0.026 as a maximum value and 0.000 as a minimum value. There were clustering co-efficient figures of 1.000 maximum and 0.000 minimum. The graph had a density of 0.001404822 and a graph modularity of 0.384943.

### 7.2.1.4 Mynewsghana.net

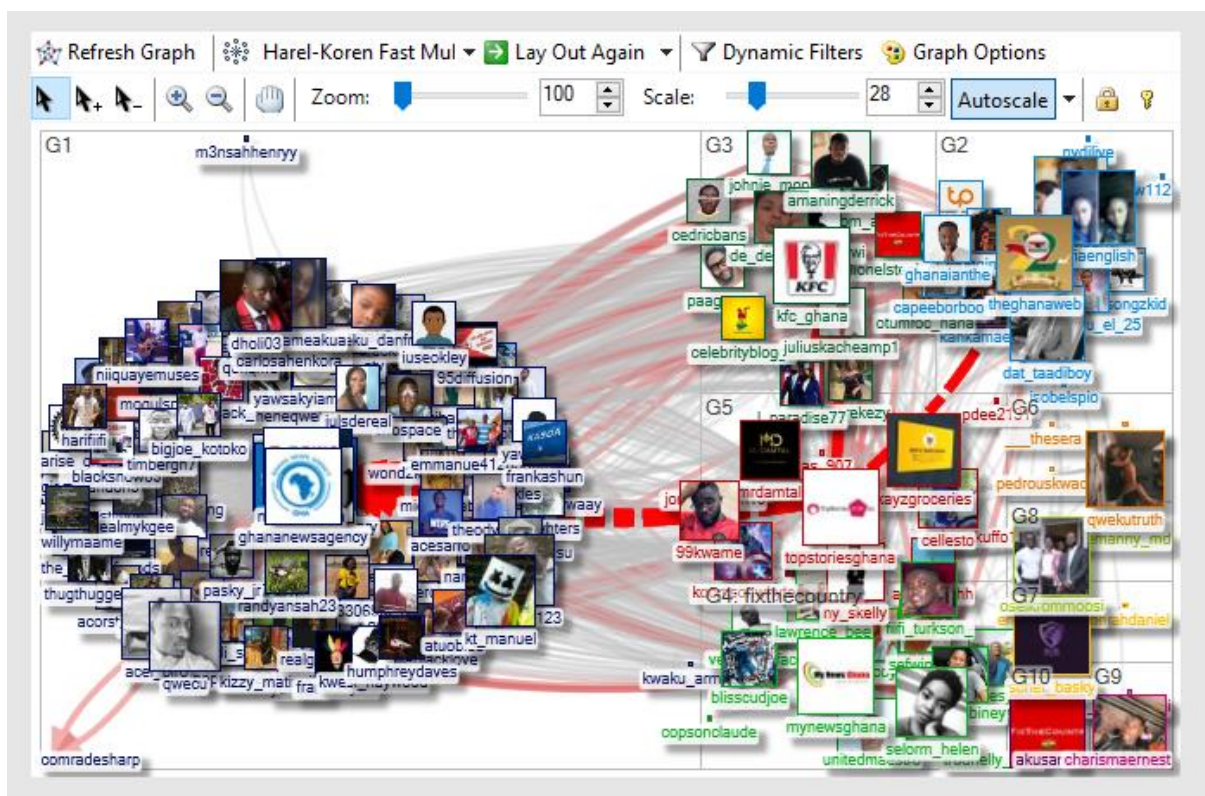
The handle used in generating the graph for *mynewsghana.net* was @mynewsghana. The graphs, as depicted in Figure 7.13 to figure 7.16, show the network visualisation of discussion groups created as a result different story links, videos and images posted by *mynewsghana.net* on their Twitter handle. As well as the tweets, retweets, mentions and replies that show news diffusion activities of their audiences.

	A	B	S	T	U	V	W	X
1			Graph Metrics					
2	Vertex	Subgraph	Degree	In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality
3	systemfoo			0	1	0.000	0.001	0.
4	mynewsgh			296	1	17900.185	0.002	0.
5	theminer			1	13	2457.151	0.001	0.
6	bbcafrica			2	0	0.000	0.001	0.
7	molepark			1	13	2457.151	0.001	0.
8	asaaseradi			2	0	0.000	0.001	0.
9	ghanadaily			2	0	0.000	0.001	0.



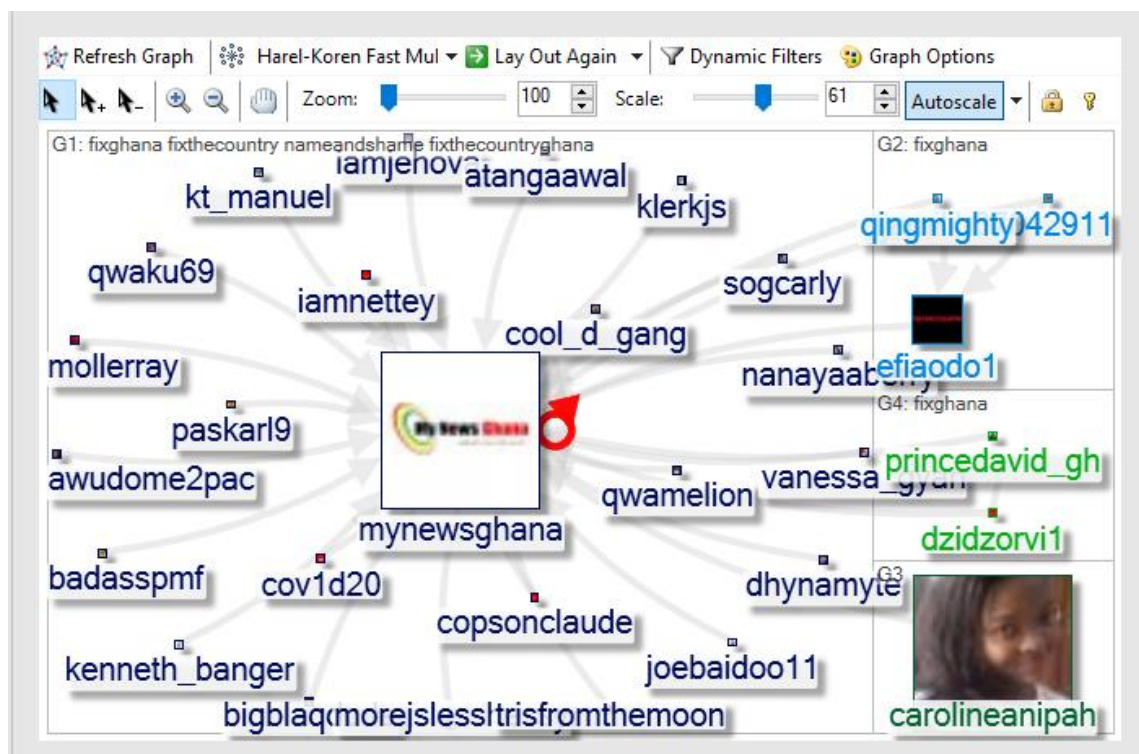
**Figure 7.13** First graphical representation of audience news diffusion activities within the Twitter social media interface generated for mynewsghana.net (Author generated, April 2021).

	A	B	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	AA	Al
1			Graph Metrics									Other Co
2	Vertex	Subgraph	Degree	In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality	PageRank	Clustering Coefficient	Reciprocated Vertex Pair Ratio	Add Your Columns
13	savannah			2	0	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.340	1.000	0.000	
14	ghnewsu			290	0	11004.609	0.002	0.015	13.224	0.014	0.000	
15	news_gha			289	11	12413.992	0.002	0.016	13.551	0.024	0.007	
16	ghananew			290	0	11004.609	0.002	0.015	13.224	0.014	0.000	
17	ausambgh			289	18	12752.979	0.002	0.017	13.706	0.035	0.017	
18	farm_mad			0	1	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.190	0.000	0.000	
19	yaapoliti			0	14	2552.023	0.001	0.001	1.851	0.071	0.000	



**Figure 7.14 Second graphical representation of audience news diffusion activities within the Twitter social media interface generated for mynewsghana.net (Author generated, April 2021).**

	A	B	S	T	U	V	W	X
1			Graph Metrics					
2	Vertex	Subgraph	Degree	In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality
3	copsoncl aude			0	1	0.000	0.017	0.000
4	mynewsgh			30	1	861.000	0.032	0.000
5	mollerray			0	1	0.000	0.017	0.000
6	trisfromth			0	1	0.000	0.017	0.000
7	atangaawa			0	1	0.000	0.017	0.000
8	klerkjs			0	1	0.000	0.017	0.000
9	awudome			0	1	0.000	0.017	0.000



**Figure 7.15** Third graphical representation of audience news diffusion activities within the Twitter social media interface generated for mynewsghana.net (Author generated, May 2021).





**Table 7.5 Analysis of network matrices used to generate various graphs for mynewsghana.net**

Graph Matrices/ characteristics	First network matrices Statistics (Figure 7.13)	Second network matrices statistics (Figure 7.14)	Third network matrices statistics (Figure 7.15)	Fourth network matrices statistics (Figure 7.16)
No of groups/topics under discussion	12	10	4	4
Number of vertexes	357	163	31	32
Unique edges	3123	1339	33	33
Edges with duplicates	3018	852	9	14
Number of edge types	5	4	4	4
Total edges	6141	2191	42	47
Retweet	193	47	21	24
Replies to	519	185	8	7
Mentions in retweet	1858	453	0	0
Mentions	3570	1506	4	4
Tweets	1	0	9	12
Self loop	5	1	9	12
Reciprocated vertex pair ratio	0.05492917	0.33534541	0	0
Reciprocated edges ratio	0.10413812	0.064892927	0	0
Connected components	1	1	1	1
Single-vertex connected components	0	0	0	0
Maximum vertexes in a connected component	357	163	31	32

Maximum edges in a connected component	6141	2194	42	47
Maximum geodesic distance (diameter)	4	4	3	3
Average geodesic distance	2.143571	2.07249	1.925078	1.927734
Graph density	0.028711485	0.058357949	0.035483871	0.034274194
Modularity	0.224176	0.134547	0.246173	0.255659
In-degree				
Maximum in-degree	296	130	30	31
Minimum in-degree	0	0	0	0
Average in-degree	10.235	9.460	1.079	1.094
Median in-degree	1.000	1.000	0.000	0.000
Out-degree				
Maximum out-degree	181	56	2	2
Minimum out-degree	0	0	0	0
Average out-degree	10.235	9.460	1.079	1.094
Median out-degree	11.000	11.000	0.000	1.000
Betweenness Centrality				
Maximum betweenness centrality	17900.185	3510.319	861.000	921.000
Minimum betweenness centrality	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Average betweenness centrality	409.255	175.816	29.677	30.688
Median betweenness centrality	0.989	1.354	0.000	0.000
Closeness Centrality				

Maximum closeness centrality	0.002	0.005	0.032	0.031
Minimum closeness centrality	0.001	0.002	0.011	0.011
Average closeness centrality	0.001	0.003	0.017	0.017
Median closeness centrality	0.001	0.003	0.017	0.016
Eigenvector Centrality				
Maximum Eigenvector Centrality	0.017	0.025	0.165	0.163
Minimum Eigenvector Centrality	0.000	0.000	0.005	0.004
Average Eigenvector Centrality	0.003	0.006	0.032	0.031
Median Eigenvector Centrality	0.003	0.006	0.027	0.027
Page Rank				
Maximum Page Rank	13.922	7.121	12.832	13.290
Minimum Page Rank	0.190	0.193	0.514	0.514
Average Page Rank	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Median Page Rank	0.577	0.613	0.514	0.514
Clustering Co-efficient				
Maximum Clustering Co-efficient	1.000	1.000	0.500	0.500
Minimum Clustering Co-efficient	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Average Clustering Co-efficient	0.263	0.152	0.075	0.073

Median Clustering Co-efficient	0.227	0.091	0.000	0.000
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Graph matrices for *mynewsghana.net* are summarised in Table 7.5 for the four weeks of data collected as part of this study. Matrices of the individual graphs in Figure 7.13 to Figure 7.16 are individually shown in the table. From Table 7.5, reading from the column labelled Figure 7.13, outlines the graph matrix for *mynewsghan.net* in the first week of the study period. There were 12 discussion groups, indicating that within the first week of the study period, audiences interacted with 12 stories, links, videos or images on @mynewsghana. There were 357 vertexes, indicating 357 individuals who were connected to and diffusing various news stories. There were 6141 edges, which depict the number of activities and the relationship between the activities that audiences undertook which resulted in 1 tweet, 193 retweets, 519 replies, 1858 mentions in retweets, 3570 mentions and 5 self loops. For the first graph, a range of 296 (maximum) and 0 (minimum) for in-degree was recorded. A range of 181 (maximum) and 0 (minimum) for out-degree was achieved. A betweenness centrality measure of 0.000 (minimum) and 17900.185 (maximum) was recorded. There was a closeness centrality measure of a minimum of 0.001 and a maximum of 0.002. The Eigenvector centrality measure was 0.000 as a minimum value and 0.017 as a maximum value. There were clustering co-efficient figures of 0.000 minimum and 1.000 maximum. The graph had a density of 0.028711485 and a graph modularity of 0.224176.

The column labelled Figure 7.14 on Table 7.5 outlines the statistics for the second week of graphical representation for *mynewsghana.net*. Audiences within that period

interacted with 10 stories, links, videos or images on the Twitter handle of *mynewsghana.net*. There were 163 vertexes, indicating 163 individuals who were connected to *mynewsghana.net* and diffused the various news stories. The total number of edges, which is 2191, depict the number of activities and the relationship between the activities, which resulted in no tweet, 47 retweets, 185 replies, 453 mentions in retweets, 1506 mentions and 1 self loop. For the second graph, a minimum and maximum of 0 and 130, respectively, were recorded for in-degree. A minimum of 0 and maximum of 56 were obtained for out-degree. A betweenness centrality measure of 3510.319 maximum and 0.000 minimum were recorded. There was a closeness centrality measure of a minimum of 0.002 and a maximum of 0.005. The Eigenvector centrality measure was 0.025 as a maximum value and 0.000 as a minimum value. There were clustering co-efficient figures of 1.000 maximum and 0.000 minimum. The graph had a density of 0.058357949 and a graph modularity of 0.134547.

Graph matrices for the third week of the study period for *mynewsghana.net* is shown in the column labelled Figure 7.15 on Table 7.5. There were four discussion groups indicating that within the third week of the study period, audiences interacted with four stories, links, videos or images on the Twitter handle of *mynewsghana.net*. There were 31 vertexes, indicating 31 individuals who were connected to and diffusing the various news stories on @mynewsghana. The total number of edges, which is 42, depict the number and relationship between activities that audiences undertook, which resulted in 9 tweets, 21 retweets, 8 replies, 4 mentions and 9 self loops. For the third graph, a range of 0 minimum and 30 maximum was recorded for in-degree. A range of 0 minimum and 2 maximum for out-degree was recorded. A betweenness centrality

measure of 861.000 maximum and 0 minimum was obtained. There was a closeness centrality measure of a maximum of 0.032 and a minimum of 0.011. The Eigenvector centrality measure was 0.165 as a maximum value and 0.005 as a minimum value. There were clustering co-efficient figures of 0.500 maximum and 0.000 minimum. The graph had a density of 0.035483871 and a graph modularity of 0.246173.

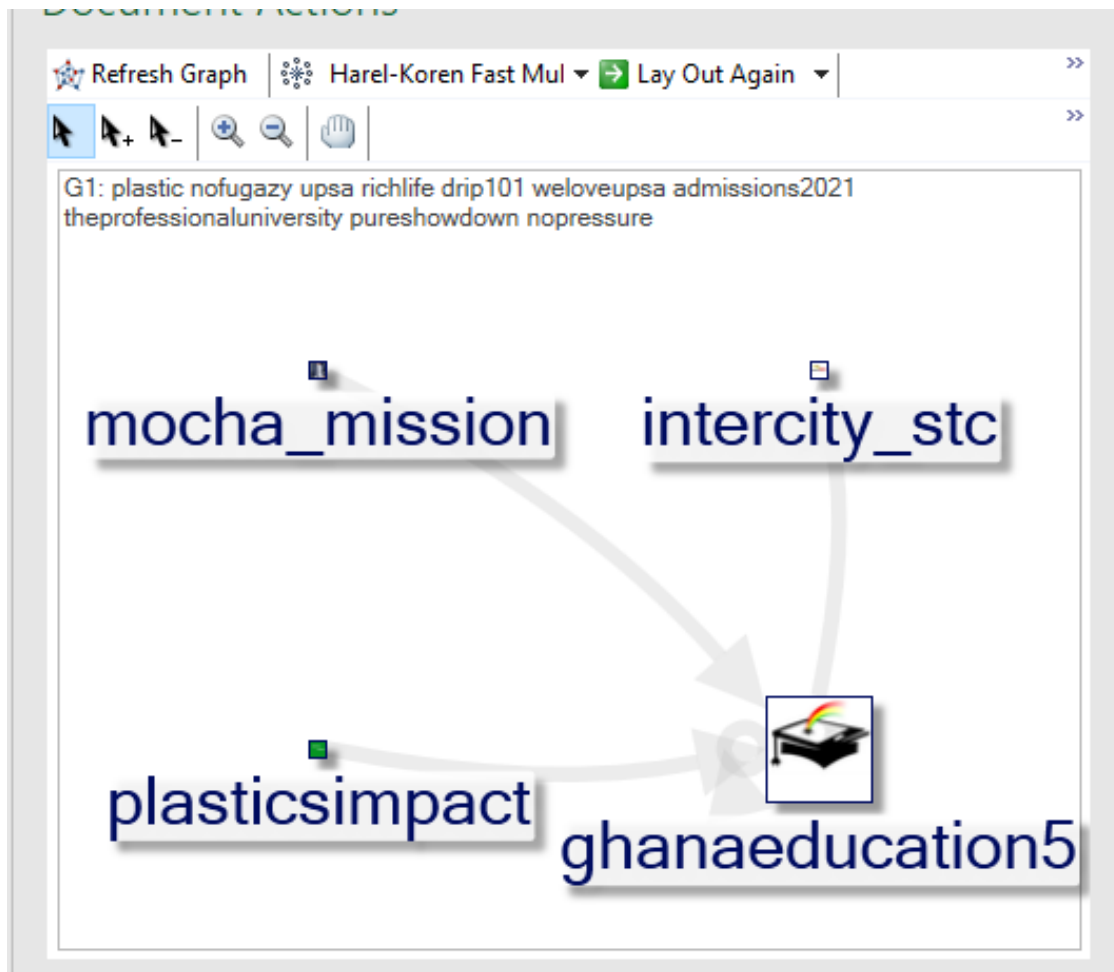
The data for the final week of the study for *mynewsghana.net* is displayed in the column labelled Figure 7.16 on Table 7.5. There were four discussion groups indicating that within the fourth week of the study period, audiences were interacting with four stories, links, videos or images on @mynewsghana. There were 32 vertexes, indicating 32 individuals who were connected to and diffusing various news stories. The total number of edges, which is 47, depict the number and relationship between activities that audiences undertook which resulted in 12 tweets, 24 retweets, 7 replies, 4 mentions and 12 self loops. For the fourth graph, a range of 0 minimum and 31 maximum was obtained for in-degree. A range of 0 minimum and 2 maximum for out-degree was obtained. A betweenness centrality measure of 921.000 maximum and 0.000 minimum was obtained. There was a closeness centrality measure of a maximum of 0.031 and a minimum of 0.011. The Eigenvector centrality measure was 0.163 as a maximum value and 0.004 as a minimum value. There were clustering co-efficient figures of 0.500 maximum and 0.000 minimum. The graph had a density of 0.034274194 and a graph modularity of 0.255659.

#### 7.2.1.5 Newsghana24.com

The handle used in generating the graph for *newsghana24.com* was

@ghanaeducation5. *Newsghana24.com* has two Twitter handles, that is, @newsghana24 and @ghanaeducation5. However, @newsghana24 has no groups in it and so it could not be used in network visualisation. @ghanaeducation5 was, thus, used for the network visualisations. The graphs, as depicted in Figure 7.17 to Figure 7.20, show the discussion groups created as a result different stories, links, images and videos posted by *newsghana24.com* on their Twitter handle and the tweets, retweets, mentions and replies that show news diffusion activities of their audiences.

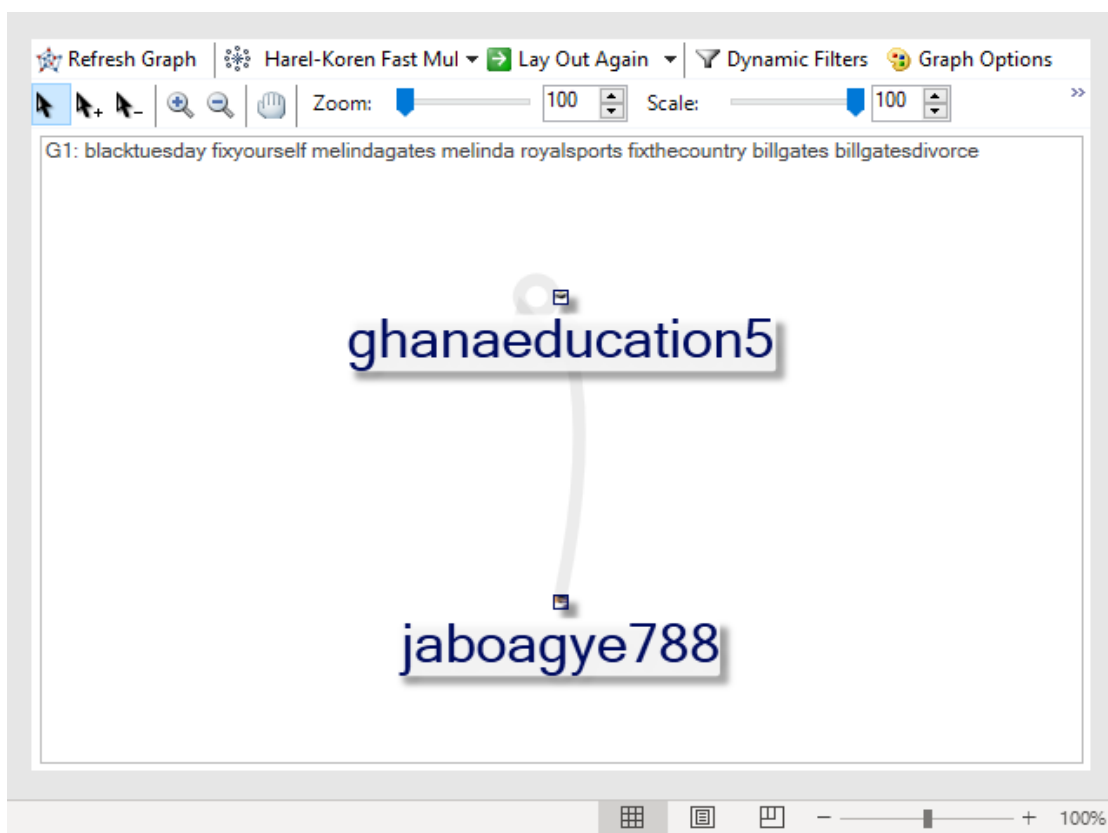
Graph Metrics										
Vertex	Subgraph	Degree	In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality	PageRank	Clustering Coefficient	
ghanaeducation5			3	2	6.000	0.333	0.434	2.168		
intercity5			1	0	0.000	0.200	0.189	0.611		
mocha_mi			0	1	0.000	0.200	0.189	0.611		
plasticsim			0	1	0.000	0.200	0.189	0.611		



**Figure 7.17** First graphical representation of audience news diffusion activities within the Twitter social media interface generated for newsghana24.com (Author generated, April 2021).

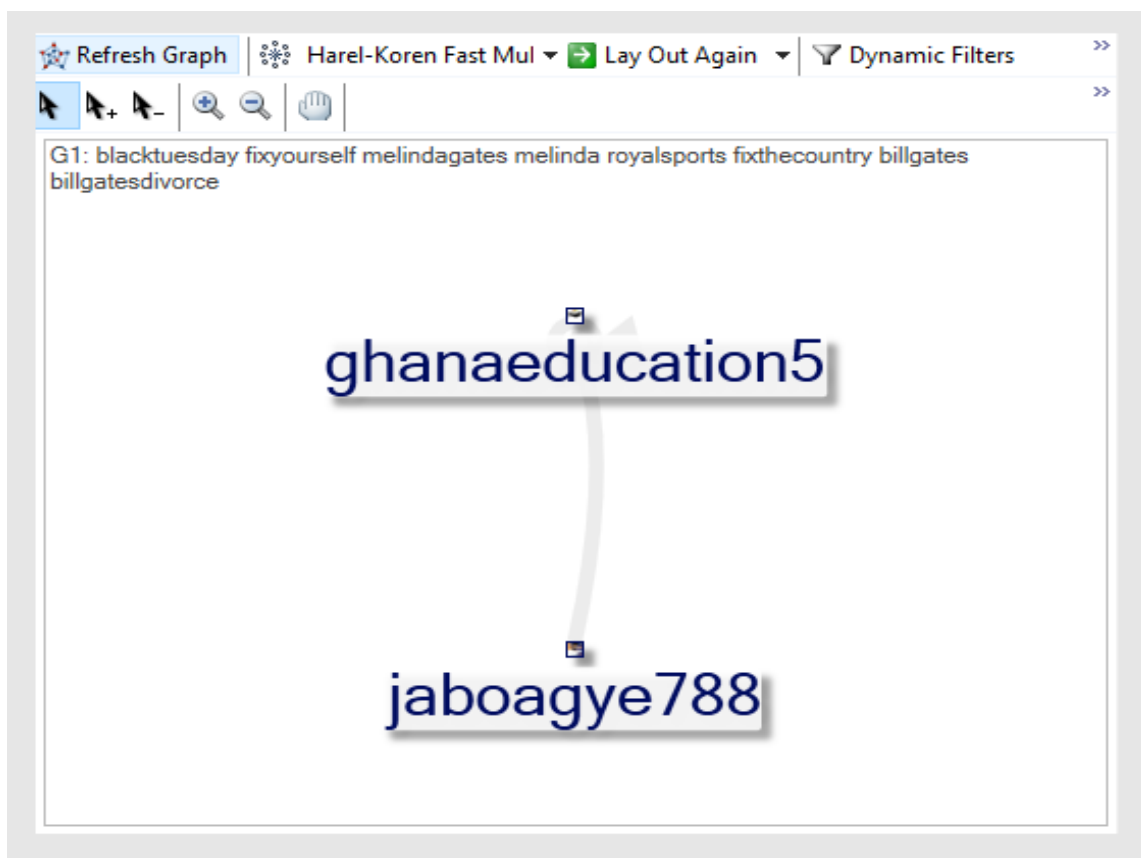


	A	B	S	T	U	V	W	X	
1			Graph Metrics						
2	Vertex	Subgraph	Degree	In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality	
3	ghanaeducation5			2	1	0.000	1.000	0.618	
4	jaboagye788			0	1	0.000	1.000	0.382	
5									
6									
7									
8									
9									
10									
11									
12									
13									
14									
15									
16									
17									
18									



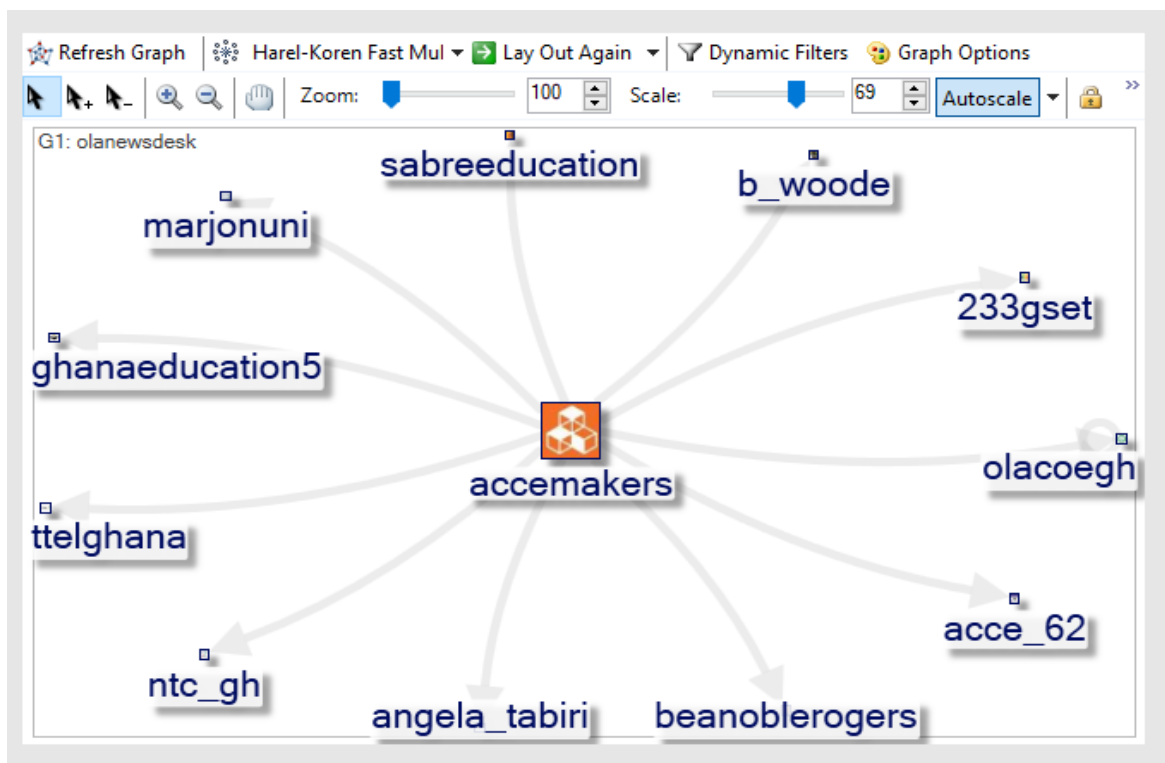
**Figure 7.18 Second graphical representation of audience news diffusion activities within the Twitter social media interface generated for newsghana24.com (Author generated, April 2021).**

	A	B	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y
1			Graph Metrics						
2	Vertex	Subgraph	Degree	In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality	PageRank
3	ghanaeducation5			2	1	0.000	1.000	0.618	1.298
4	jaboagye788			0	1	0.000	1.000	0.382	0.702
5									
6									
7									
8									
9									
10									
11									
12									
13									
14									
15									
16									
17									
18									



**Figure 7.19 Third graphical representation of audience news diffusion activities within the Twitter social media interface generated for newsghana24.com (Author generated, May 2021).**

	A	B	S	T	U	V	W	X
1			Graph Metrics					
2	Vertex	Subgraph	Degree	In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality
3	accemakers			0	11	110.000	0.091	0.2
4	sabreeduc			1	0	0.000	0.048	0.0
5	acce_62			1	0	0.000	0.048	0.0
6	beanobler			1	0	0.000	0.048	0.0
7	ntc_gh			1	0	0.000	0.048	0.0
8	ghanaeduc			1	0	0.000	0.048	0.0
9	233gset			1	0	0.000	0.048	0.0



**Figure 7.20** Fourth graphical representation of audience news diffusion activities within the Twitter social media interface generated for newsghana24.com (Author generated, May 2021).

**Table 7.6 Analysis of network matrices used to generate various graphs for newsghana24.com**

Graph Matrices/ characteristics	First network metric statistics (Figure 7.17)	Second network metric statistics (Figure 7.18)	Third network metric statistics (Figure 7.19)	Fourth network metric statistics (Figure 7.20)
No of groups/topics under discussion	1	1	1	1
Number of vertexes	4	2	2	12
Unique edges	4	2	2	12
Edges with duplicates	0	0	0	0
Number of edge types	4	2	2	3
Total edges	4	2	2	12
Replies to	1	0	1	1
Mentions in retweet	1	0	0	0
Mentions	1	0	0	10
Retweets	1	1	1	1
Tweets	1	1	1	1
Self loop	1	1	1	1
Reciprocated vertex pair ratio	0	0	0	0
Reciprocated edges ratio	0	0	0	0
Connected components	1	1	1	1
Single-vertex connected components	0	0	0	0
Maximum vertexes in a connected component	0	2	2	12

Maximum edges in a connected component	4	2	2	12
Maximum geodesic distance (diameter)	2	1	1	2
Average geodesic distance	1.125	0.5	0.05	1.680556
Graph density	0.25	0.5	0.5	0.083333333
Modularity	0.109375	0.1875	0.1875	0.039931
In-degree				
Maximum in-degree	3	2	2	2
Minimum in-degree	0	0	0	0
Average in-degree	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Median in-degree	0.500	1.000	1.000	1.000
Out-degree				
Maximum out-degree	3	1	1	11
Minimum out-degree	0	1	1	0
Average out-degree	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Median out-degree	1.000	1.000	1.000	0.000
Betweenness Centrality				
Maximum betweenness centrality	6.000	0.000	0.000	110.000
Minimum betweenness centrality	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Average betweenness centrality	1.500	0.000	0.000	9.167
Median betweenness centrality	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Closeness Centrality				

Maximum closeness centrality	0.333	1.000	1.000	0.091
Minimum closeness centrality	0.200	1.000	1.000	0.048
Average closeness centrality	0.233	1.000	1.000	0.051
Median closeness centrality	0.200	1.000	1.000	0.048
Eigenvector Centrality				
Maximum Eigenvector Centrality	0.434	0.618	0.618	0.219
Minimum Eigenvector Centrality	0.189	0.382	0.382	0.069
Average Eigenvector Centrality	0.250	0.500	0.500	0.083
Median Eigenvector Centrality	0.189	0.500	0.500	0.069
Page Rank				
Maximum Page Rank	2.168	1.298	1.298	5.369
Minimum Page Rank	0.611	0.702	0.072	0.565
Average Page Rank	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Median Page Rank	0.611	1.000	1.000	0.565
Clustering Co-efficient				
Maximum Clustering Co-efficient	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Minimum Clustering Co-efficient	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Average Clustering Co-efficient	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Median Clustering Co-efficient	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Graph matrices for *newsghana24.com* are summarised in Table 7.6 for the four weeks of data collected as part of this study. Matrices of the individual graphs (Figure 7.17 to Figure 7.20) are displayed in the table. Data for the first week is displayed in the column labelled Figure 7.17 on Table 7.6. There was one discussion group, indicating that within the first week of the study period, audiences were interacting with one story, link, video or image on @ghanaeducation5. There were four vertexes, indicating four individuals who were connected and diffusing various news stories. There were four edges, which depict the number of activities and the relationship between activities that audiences undertook which resulted in one tweet, one retweet, one reply, one mention in retweet, one mention and one self loop. For the first graph, a range of 3 (maximum) and 1 (minimum) was recorded for in-degree. A range of 0 (minimum) and 3 (maximum) for out-degree was recorded. A betweenness centrality measure of 0.000 (minimum) and 6.000 (maximum) was recorded. There was a closeness centrality measure of a minimum of 0.200 and a maximum of 0.333. The Eigenvector centrality measure was 0.189 as a minimum value and 0.434 as a maximum value. There were clustering co-efficient figures of 0.000 maximum and 0.000 minimum. The graph had a density of 0.25 indicating and a graph modularity of 0.109375.

The column labelled Figure 7.18 on Table 7.6 outlines the statistics for the second week of graphical network visualisation for *newsghana24.com*. Audiences within that period interacted with one story, link, video or image on the Twitter handle of *newsghana24.com*. There were two vertexes, indicating one individual and the news organisation itself involved in activities. The number of edges, which is two, depict the number of activities and relationship between activities that the audience undertook which resulted in one tweet and one retweet. For the second graph, a range of 2

maximum and 0 minimum was recorded for in-degree. A range of 1 minimum and 1 maximum for out-degree was obtained. A betweenness centrality measure of 0.000 maximum and 0.000 minimum. There was a closeness centrality measure of a maximum of 1.000 and a minimum of 1.000. The Eigenvector centrality measure was 0.382 as a minimum value and 0.618 as a maximum value. There were clustering co-efficient figures of 0.000 as maximum and 0.000 as minimum values. The graph had a density of 0.5 and a graph modularity of 0.1875.

Graph matrices for the third week of the study period for *newsghana24.com* is shown in the column labelled Figure 7.19 on Table 7.6. There was one discussion group indicating that within the third week of the study period, audiences interacted with one story, link, video or image on the Twitter handle of *newsghana24.com*. There were two vertexes, indicating that two individuals were connected to the *newsghana24.com* Twitter handle and were involved in diffusing the various news stories. There were two edges, which depict the number and relationship between activities undertaken which resulted in one tweet, one retweet and one self loop. For the third graph, a range of 0 minimum and 2 maximum was recorded for in-degree. A range of 1 minimum and 1 maximum for out-degree were recorded. A betweenness centrality measure of 0.000 maximum and 0.000 minimum was obtained. There was a closeness centrality measure of a maximum of 1.000 and a minimum of 1.000. The Eigenvector centrality measure was 0.618 as a maximum value and 0.382 as a minimum value. There were clustering co-efficient figures of 0.000 maximum and 0.000 minimum. The graph had a density of 0.5 and a graph modularity of 0.1875.

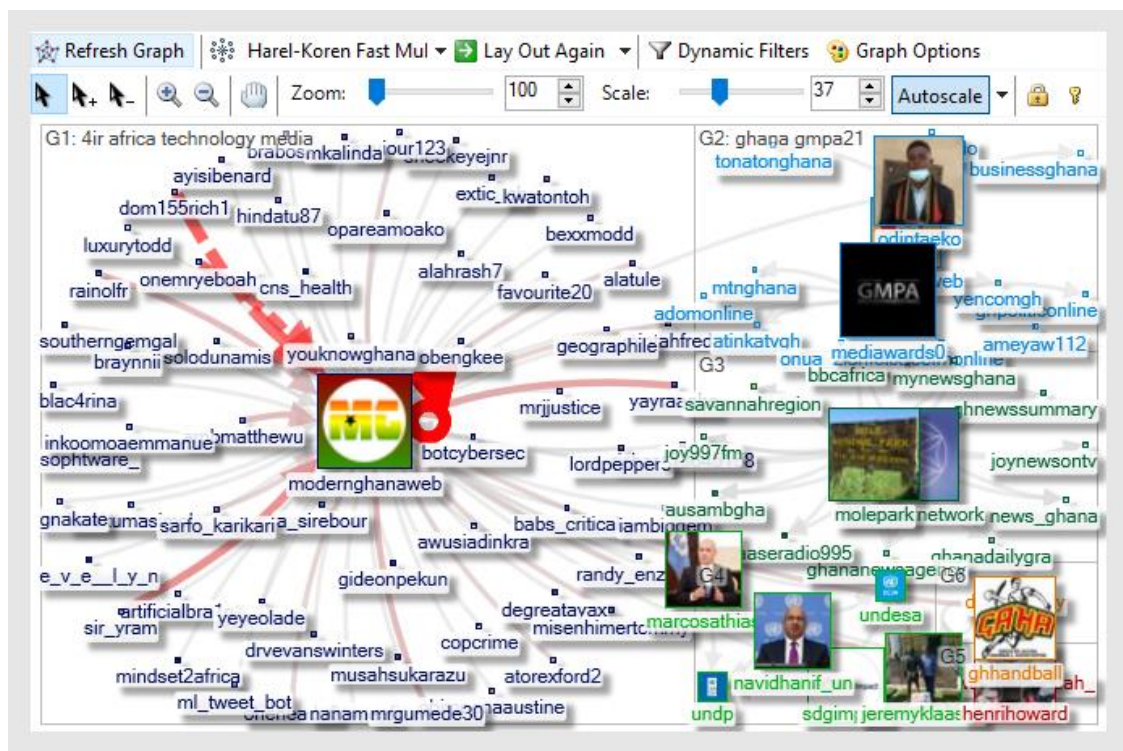


The output of data collected for the final week of the study for *newsghana24.com* is displayed in the column labelled Figure 7.20 on Table 7.6. There was one discussion group indicating that within the fourth week of the study period, audiences were interacting with one story, link, video or image on @ghanaeducation5. There were 12 vertexes, indicating that 12 individuals were connected to the Twitter handle of *newsghana24.com* and were involved in diffusing the news stories, links, videos or images. The total number of edges, which is 12, depict the number and relationship between activities that audiences undertook which resulted in one tweet, one retweet, one reply, 10 mentions and one self loop. In this graph, the matrix shows a range of 0 minimum and 2 maximum for in-degree. A range of 0 minimum and 11 maximum for out-degree was obtained. A betweenness centrality measure of 110.000 maximum and 0.000 minimum was obtained. There was a closeness centrality measure of a maximum of 0.091 and a minimum of 0.048. The Eigenvector centrality measure was 0.219 as a maximum value and 0.069 as a minimum value. There were clustering coefficient figures of 0.000 maximum and 0.000 minimum. The graph had a density of 0.083333333 and a graph modularity of 0.039931.

#### 7.2.1.6 Modernghana.com

The handle used in generating the graph for *modernghana.com* was @modernghanaweb. The graph, as depicted in Figure 7.21 to Figure 7.24, shows the discussion groups created as a result different story links posted by *modernghana.com* on their Twitter handle, as well as the tweets, retweets, mentions and replies that show news diffusion activities of their audiences.

	A	B	S	T	U	V	W	X
1			Graph Metrics					
2	Vertex	Subgraph	Degree	In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality
3	awusiadin			0	1	0.000	0.005	0.
4	moderngh			70	1	8783.000	0.008	0.
5	botcybers			0	1	0.000	0.005	0.
6	braynnii			0	1	0.000	0.005	0.
7	randy_enz			0	1	0.000	0.005	0.
8	mkalinda			0	1	0.000	0.005	0.
9	kwatontoh			0	1	0.000	0.005	0.



**Figure 7.21** First graphical representation of audience news diffusion activities within the Twitter social media interface generated for modernghana.com (Author generated, April 2021).

Graph Metrics									
Vertex	Subgraph	Degree	In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality	PageRank	
mac_clusk				0	1	0.000	0.002	0.008	0
moderngh				71	1	21418.444	0.004	0.080	24
gogivetim				0	1	0.000	0.002	0.008	0
fmvelien				0	1	0.000	0.002	0.008	0
henry_vyb				0	1	0.000	0.002	0.008	0
ebeneze7				0	1	0.000	0.002	0.008	0
mwade69				0	1	0.000	0.002	0.008	0

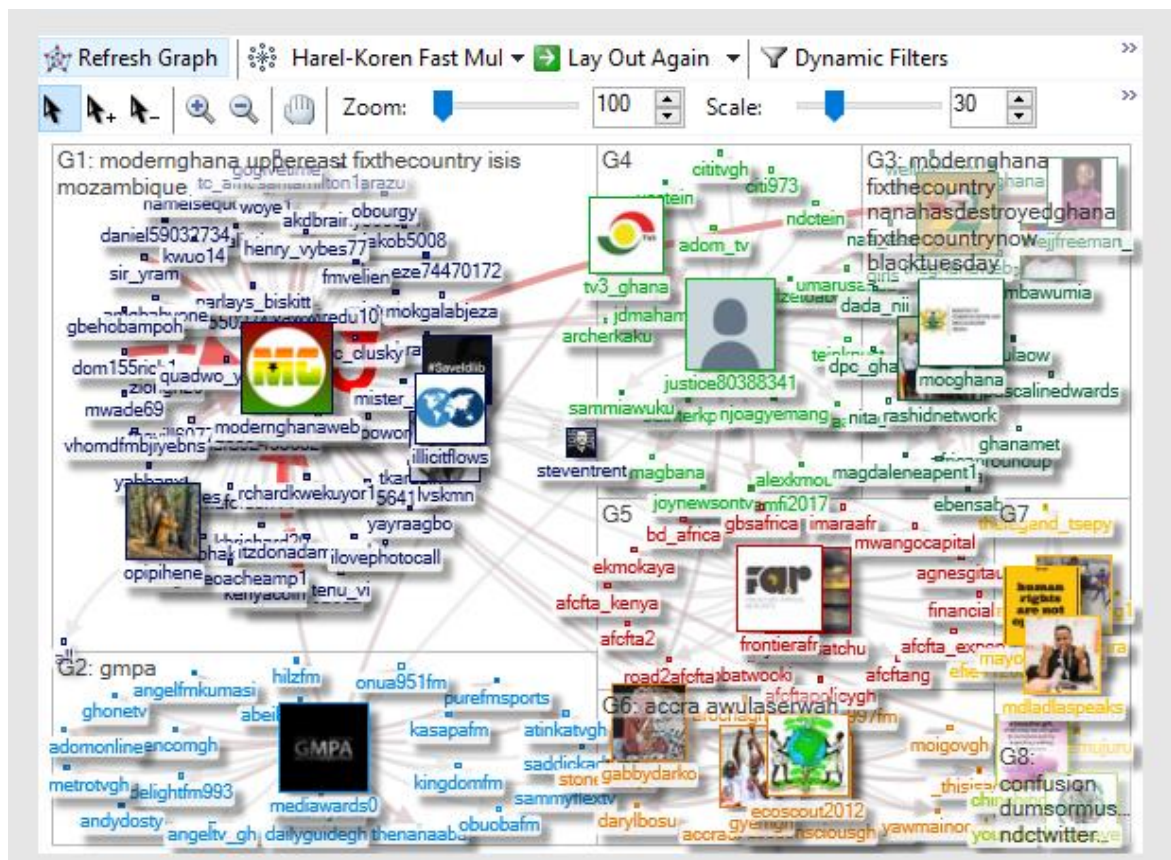
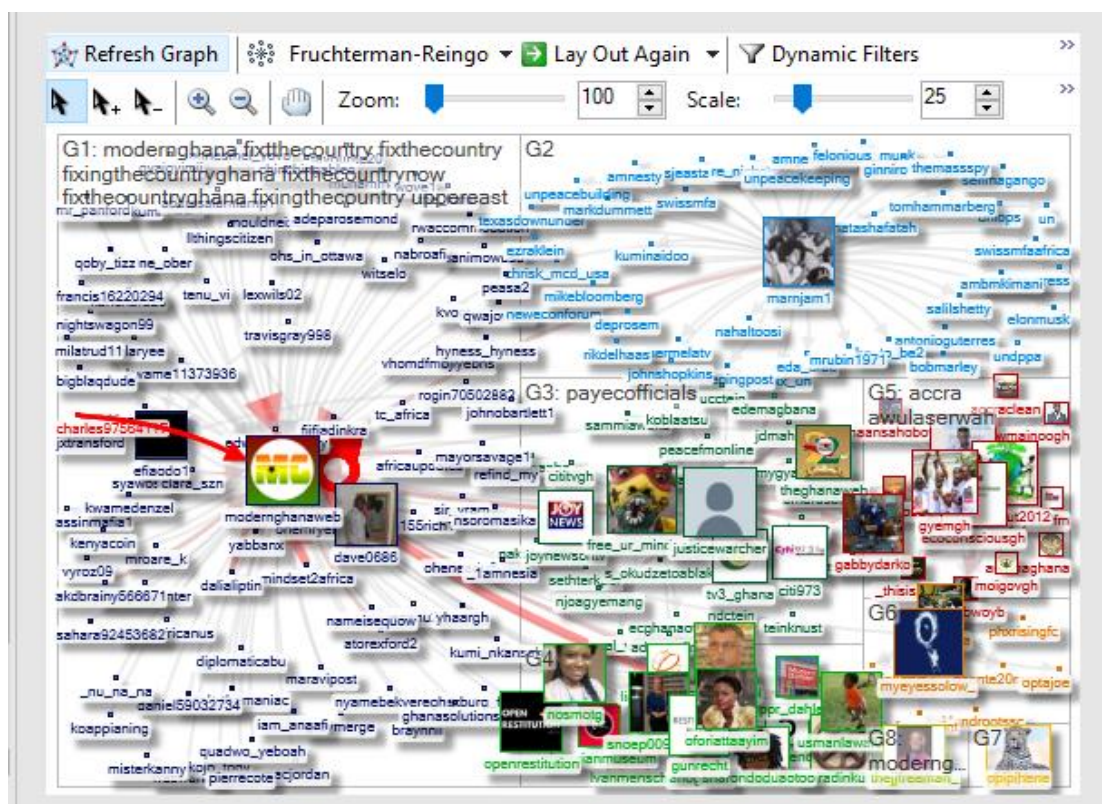


Figure 7.22 Second graphical representation of audience news diffusion activities within the Twitter social media interface generated for modernghana.com (Author generated, April 2021).

	A	B	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	
1			Graph Metrics							
2	Vertex	Subgraph	Degree	In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality	PageRank	
3	ghanasolu				0	1	0.000	0.002	0.005	0.44
4	moderngh				111	1	37470.865	0.003	0.067	37.8
5	sahara924				0	1	0.000	0.002	0.005	0.44
6	quadwo_y				0	1	0.000	0.002	0.005	0.44
7	charles975				0	1	0.000	0.002	0.005	0.44
8	sir_yram				0	1	0.000	0.002	0.005	0.44
9	dalialiptin				0	1	0.000	0.002	0.005	0.44



**Figure 7.23** Third graphical representation of audience news diffusion activities within the Twitter social media interface generated for modernghana.com (Author generated, May 2021).

	A	B	S	T	U	V	W	X
1			Graph Metrics					
2	Vertex	Subgraph	Degree	In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality
3	mouldneiz			1	1	0.000	0.002	0.009
4	moderngh			79	1	33030.433	0.003	0.078
5	realaryee			0	2	0.000	0.002	0.009
6	diplomatic			0	1	0.000	0.002	0.008
7	africaupda			0	1	0.000	0.002	0.008
8	waswahili			0	1	0.000	0.002	0.008
9	muhamma			0	1	0.000	0.002	0.008

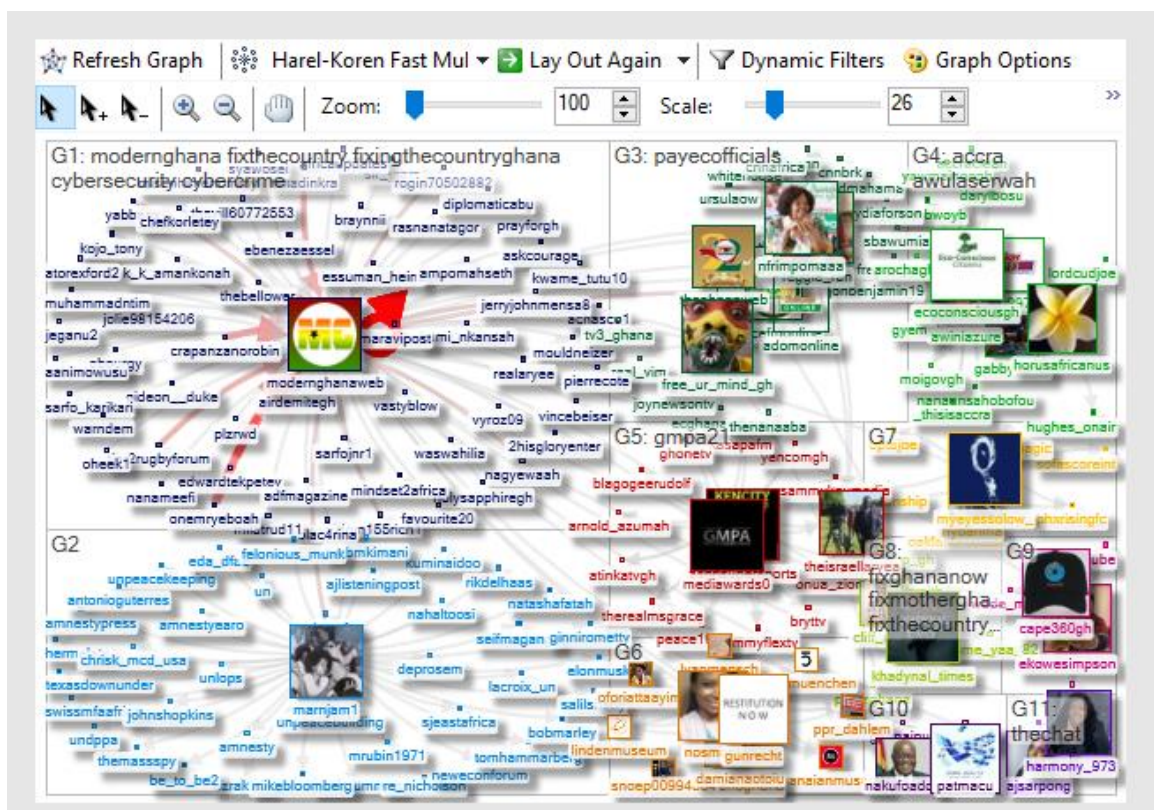


Figure 7.24 Fourth graphical representation of audience news diffusion activities within the Twitter social media interface generated for modernghana.com (Author generated, May 2021).

**Table 7.7 Analysis of network matrices used to generate various graphs for modernghana.com**

Graph Matrices/ characteristics	First network metric statistics (Figure 7.21)	Second network metric statistics (Figure 7.22)	Third network metric statistics (Figure 7.23)	Fourth network metric statistics (Figure 7.24)
No of groups/topics under discussion	6	8	8	11
Number of vertexes	97	159	203	192
Unique edges	101	177	284	263
Edges with duplicates	118	183	174	107
Number of edge types	5	5	5	5
Total edges	219	360	458	370
Replies to	34	63	52	27
Mentions in retweet	23	65	116	67
Mentions	40	148	122	138
Tweets	56	34	77	69
Retweets	66	50	91	69
Self loop	57	36	78	69
Reciprocated vertex pair ratio	0.0083333333	0.017241379	0.012461059	0.003636364
Reciprocated edges ratio	0.016528926	0.033898305	0.024615385	0.007246377
Connected components	1	1	1	1
Single-vertex connected components	0	0	0	0
Maximum vertexes in a connected component	97	159	203	192

Maximum edges in a connected component	219	360	485	370
Maximum geodesic distance (diameter)	4	4	4	4
Average geodesic distance	2.447869	2.932716	2.755757	3.005154
Graph density	0.012993986	0.009394157	0.007925669	0.007526178
Modularity	0.397083	0.523177	0.549467	0.602261
In-degree				
Maximum in-degree	70	71	111	79
Minimum in-degree	0	0	0	0
Average in-degree	1.268	1.503	1.611	1.448
Median in-degree	0.000	1.000	0.000	1.000
Out-degree				
Maximum out-degree	13	24	41	41
Minimum out-degree	0	0	0	0
Average out-degree	1.268	1.503	1.611	1.448
Median out-degree	1.000	0.000	1.000	0.000
Betweenness Centrality				
Maximum betweenness centrality	8783.000	21418.444	37470.865	33030.433
Minimum betweenness centrality	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Average betweenness centrality	141.443	308.302	357.419	385.990
Median betweenness centrality	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Closeness Centrality				

Maximum closeness centrality	0.008	0.004	0.003	0.003
Minimum closeness centrality	0.003	0.002	0.001	0.001
Average closeness centrality	0.004	0.002	0.002	0.002
Median closeness centrality	0.005	0.002	0.002	0.002
Eigenvector Centrality				
Maximum Eigenvector Centrality	0.102	0.080	0.067	0.078
Minimum Eigenvector Centrality	0.001	0.001	0.000	0.001
Average Eigenvector Centrality	0.010	0.006	0.005	0.005
Median Eigenvector Centrality	0.011	0.006	0.005	0.003
Page Rank				
Maximum Page Rank	27.974	24.740	37.875	27.799
Minimum Page Rank	0.490	0.398	0.434	0.410
Average Page Rank	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Median Page Rank	0.490	0.513	0.479	0.540
Clustering Co-efficient				
Maximum Clustering Co-efficient	1.000	1.000	0.500	1.000
Minimum Clustering Co-efficient	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Average Clustering Co-efficient	0.145	0.211	0.078	0.181



Median Clustering Co-efficient	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
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Graph matrices for *modernghana.com* are summarised in Table 7.7 above for the four weeks of data collected for this study. Matrixes of the individual graphs in Figure 7.21 to Figure 7.24 are displayed in the table. From Table 7.7, reading from the column labelled Figure 7.21, is an outline of the graph matrices for @modernghanaweb in the first week of the study period. There were six discussion groups indicating that within the first week of the study period, audiences were interacting with six stories, links, videos or images on the Twitter handle of modernghana.com. There were 97 vertexes, indicating 97 individuals who were connected and diffusing various news stories within that period. There were 219 edges, which depict the number of activities and the relationship between the activities that audiences undertook. This resulted in 56 tweets, 66 retweets, 34 replies, 23 mentions in retweets, 40 mentions and 57 self loops. For the first graph, a range of 70 (maximum) and 0 (minimum) for in-degree was recorded. A range of 13 (maximum) and 0 (minimum) for out-degree was obtained. A betweenness centrality measure of 8783.000 (maximum) and 0.000 (minimum) was recorded. There was a closeness centrality measure of a maximum of 0.008 and a minimum of 0.003. The Eigenvector centrality measure was 0.001 as a minimum value and 0.102 as a maximum value. There were clustering co-efficient figures of 1.000 maximum and 0.000 minimum. The graph had a density of 0.012993986 and a graph modularity of 0.397083.

The column labelled Figure 7.22 on Table 7.7 outlines the graph matrix for the second week of data collected for *modernghana.com*. Audiences within that period interacted

with eight stories, links, videos or images on the Twitter handle of *modernghana.com*. There were 159 vertexes, indicating 159 individuals who were connected to and diffusing the various news stories. The number of edges, which is 360, depict the number of activities and the relationship between the activities undertaken by audiences which resulted in 34 tweets, 50 retweets, 63 replies, 65 mentions in retweets, 148 mentions and 36 self loops. For the second graph, a range of 71 maximum and 0 minimum was achieved for in-degree. A range of 24 maximum and 0 minimum for out-degree was obtained. A betweenness centrality measure of 0.000 minimum and 21418.444 maximum was recorded. There was a closeness centrality measure of a minimum of 0.002 and a maximum of 0.004. The Eigenvector centrality measure was 0.001 as a minimum value and 0.080 as a maximum value. There were clustering co-efficient figures of 1.000 maximum and 0.000 minimum. The graph had a density of 0.009394157 and a graph modularity of 0.523177.

The column labelled Figure 7.23 on Table 7.7 displays the graph matrices for the third week of the study period for *modernghana.com*. There were eight discussion groups, indicating that within the third week of the study period, audiences interacted with eight stories, links, videos or images on the Twitter handle of *modernghana.com*. There were 203 vertexes, indicating 203 individuals who were connected to @modernghanaweb and diffusing the various news stories. The total number of edges, which is 458, depict the number of activities and the relationship between these activities by audiences which resulted in 77 tweets, 91 retweets, 52 replies, 116 mentions in retweets, 122 mentions and 78 self loops. For the third graph, a range of 0 as minimum and 111 as maximum was recorded for in-degree. A range of 0 minimum and 41 maximum for out-degree was recorded. A betweenness centrality measure of

37470.865 maximum and 0.000 minimum was recorded. There was a closeness centrality measure of a maximum of 0.003 and a minimum of 0.001. The Eigenvector centrality measure was 0.067 as a maximum value and 0.000 as a minimum value. There were clustering co-efficient figures of 0.500 maximum and 0.000 minimum. The graph had a density of 0.007925669 and a graph modularity of 0.549467.

The data for the network visualisation for the final week of the study for *modernghana.com* is displayed in the column labelled Figure 7.24 on Table 7.7. There were 11 discussion groups indicating that, within the fourth week of the study period, audiences were interacting with 11 stories, links, videos or images on @modernghanaweb. There were 192 vertexes, indicating that 192 individuals were connected to the Twitter handle of *modernghana.com* and were involved in diffusing the various news stories. The total number of edges, which is 370, depict the number of activities undertaken by audiences within that period and the relationship between these activities. This resulted in 69 tweets, 69 retweets, 27 replies, 67 mentions in retweets, 138 mentions and 69 self loops. The final graph matrices produced a range of 0 minimum and 79 maximum for in-degree. A range of 0 minimum and 41 maximum for out-degree was obtained. A betweenness centrality measure of 33030.433 maximum and 0.000 minimum was obtained. There was a closeness centrality measure of a maximum of 0.003 and a minimum of 0.001. The Eigenvector centrality measure was 0.078 as a maximum value and 0.001 as a minimum value. There were clustering co-efficient figures of 1.000 maximum and 0.000 minimum. The graph had a density of 0.007526178 and a graph modularity of 0.602261.

The subsequent sections of this chapter present the data analysed for the semi-structured interviews

### **7.2.2 Data analysis and presentation of data for semi-structured interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather meaningful insights about how media outlets use their gatekeeping activities to build brand personality for their outlets and how it impacts news diffusion by their audiences. Especially on online digital news platforms. Denzin and Lincoln (2000: 633) note that “we live in an interview society, in a society whose members seem to believe interviews generate useful information about lived experience and meanings”. These interview sessions were engaging and insightful, providing detailed accounts about the experiences and perceptions of the participants on the different topics discussed. Because of the surge in the Covid-19 cases in Ghana during the time in which this study was conducted, interviews were held on the Zoom platform. This meant the researcher did not have physical face-to-face contact with the interviewees. This was a requirement of the University of South Africa under the terms of ethical clearance certification to minimise risk to the participants and the researcher.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 professionals (this was made up of six online news editors, four social media curators and five social media managers). All the three traditional media brand extensions (*peacefmonline.com*, *myjoyonline.com* and *citifmonline.com*) had a social media manager, social media curator and an online news editor, hence, the three professionals were interviewed for each outlet. For the stand-alone digital media outlets, however, *mynewsghana.com* had a social media

manager, social media curator and online news editor and so three interviews were held. *Modernghana.com* has only an online news editor and a social media manager who multitasked on the duties of the social media curator. Two interviews were organised with them. *Newsghana24* had only an online news editor taking on the responsibilities of a social media manager and social media curator. Only one interview was held there, but the session also covered questions for the social media manager and social media curator. The interviews were held from 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2021 to 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2021. The researcher had three pre-prepared interview schedules (Appendices B, C and D), one each for the online news editors, social media curators and social media managers to suit their job descriptions. The interview schedules guided the interviews rather than dictating what should be asked (Smith, Harré & Langenhoven 1995:26). The questions had to be reframed when it was realised that six of the professionals from the online digital media outlets without traditional media affiliation had no experience at all with radio. Also, some of the questions applied only to the traditional media digital brand extensions (See Appendices A to D).

The interviews sessions and processes were not daunting because permission letters had been submitted before the ethical clearance process and the news outlets had given their consent to participate in the study. Additionally, most interviewees, especially the online news media gatekeepers, were delighted to engage and be part of the research because they rarely had such an opportunity. All interviews were held on Zoom due to Covid-19 restrictions. With the permission of the interviewees, all interview sessions were recorded. After the interviews, the recordings were listened to over a period for familiarisation. All the interview recordings were transcribed for easy analysis. Transcribing is the means of producing recorded audio in a written text

form (Halcomb & Davidson 2006). Some researchers advance two approaches to transcribing, namely naturalised and denaturalised transcriptions (Azevedo et al. 2017:163). They assert that to make the spoken or verbal information readable may call for denaturalised transcription, which requires reduction, interpretation and representation, instead of just listening and writing verbatim. While the assertion by Azevedo et al. (2017:163) sounds logical, given the chunk of data from the interviews, it might take out some necessary information which could make the verbal information incomplete, thus, distorting the meaning of the interview contextually. This, in effect, could jeopardise the validity of the data. Data transcription for this study was based on the naturalised transcription, which was a verbatim and complete transcription in order to ensure validity, authenticity and contextual understanding of the transcribed data. Transcriptions were done on individual interview informational sheets bearing the interviewee's details – name, position and media organisation. These transcripts were sent to the interviewees for confirmation, correction and, where applicable, checking of information to ensure factual accuracy. It was also a way to engage the participants to structure the report and to ensure trustworthiness and member checking. After confirmation of information from the interviewees, corrections were made in my master transcripts. In the next stage, the transcripts from the traditional media gatekeepers were separated from those of the online news media gatekeepers to help in distinguishing the processes undertaken by each category. Video interview recordings, as gathered in this study, mostly reflect the interviewees' emotions, opinions, experiences and other personal aspects which are sensitive information (Azevedo et al 2017:165). Such information needs protection after transcription. In protecting the identity of my interviewees, the video interviews, as well as the transcribed interview information were kept and password protected on my laptop

computer for future use, such as when the thesis is examined and corrections have been affected for final submission.

The transcripts were read and re-read to generate initial patterns of information for each category of gatekeepers. After careful reading through the manuscripts and initial patterns generated, the researcher went about spotlight coding (Henderson & Segal 2013; Miles & Huberman 1994; Woolf & Silver 2017). This was purposive in establishing themes that could help organise and tell the story of traditional media gatekeepers separately from that of online media gatekeepers regarding their gatekeeping activities for brand building on their online digital media platforms. This helped to regroup similar ideas from individual interview transcripts and the initial patterns and themes into the categories derived from the conceptual framework.

The next sub-sections deal with the findings obtained from the semi-structured interviews. The research method adopted was qualitative and, by implication, the presentation was first captured in the form of tables to simplify the themes generated. This is followed by detailed presentation of the findings in the form of quotes through a narrative approach. The final themes and sub-themes generated are shown distinctively for traditional media gatekeepers and online news media gatekeepers in the Tables 7.8 and 7.9 below, with corresponding presentation and excerpts in subsequent sections.

### 7.2.2.1 Data presentation of semi-structured interviews for radio online digital brand extensions

Tables 7.8 and 7.9, as well as the sections that follow, present data for the semi-structured interviews. Data is presented separately for radio online brand extensions and solely online news outlets separately.

Table 7.8: Themes and sub-themes generated from the analysis of the semi-structured interview transcripts of traditional media gatekeepers

Categories generated from conceptual framework	Themes	Sub-themes
<b>Gatekeeping strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Why new media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New media opportunities harnessed to increase news diffusion and audience base.</li> <li>New media is meant to hype the traditional media outlet.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The newsroom is the major source of information for new media platforms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Absolute dependence on newsrooms for news content for website and social media handles with little prerogative to staff of all categories.</li> <li>News undergoes rigorous editorial process before passing for publication.</li> </ul>
<b>Branding Strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Journalistic branding is emphasised rather than commercial branding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most news stories are mainly journalistic based: social, political, advocacy and environmental stories.</li> <li>Market orientations are limited because their operations are converged, with integrated financing.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I brand, you brand, we brand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activities performed by each news outlet within the group is geared towards total group branding.</li> <li>Brand name and credibility of traditional media wing created</li> </ul>



		<p>over the years sells the online digital brand extension.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content strategy on digital platforms considered a very essential brand building strategy.</li> </ul>
<b>Signalling strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• News is seen as a critical business: content is geared towards the branding agenda</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive signalling costs enhanced through employing qualified staff to various positions.</li> <li>• Negative signalling costs are discouraged by crosschecking facts before broadcast or publishing.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• brand awareness is hyped through social/non-studio programmes</li> </ul>	
<b>News Diffusion Strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enhanced news diffusion strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual outlets within the group have separate social media accounts to create increased news diffusion and engagement with audiences.</li> <li>• Audiences are considered highly inclusive in the news diffusion agenda.</li> <li>• Systems have been put in place to check analytics of news diffusion on social media.</li> </ul>

### 7.2.2.1.1 Gatekeeping strategies

Traditional media gatekeepers interviewed in this study had somewhat similar gatekeeping activities as the online news media gatekeepers. However, some activities varied and were exclusive to them. Additionally, even among the traditional media gatekeepers, there existed differences that distinguished each media brand and their strategies. Inasmuch as the three traditional media outlets sampled for this study depended solely on their newsroom for information for their website and social media handles, digital media executives from *citifmonline.com* and *peacefmonline.com* had some amount of freedom to exercise their prerogative in deciding content for social media. They could re-publish information which derived from social media itself or

content that, in their estimation, could generate audience engagement. *Myjoyonline.com*, on the other hand, depends solely on the newsroom that serves both traditional media and the new media with information for publication. They also have an online-first policy which ensures that all information is first published on the digital channels before it goes onto the traditional media. The following are the themes and sub-themes generated.

#### *7.2.2.1.1.1 Theme 1: Why new media?*

The study was interested in finding out why traditional media gatekeepers instituted new media platforms as brand extensions to their traditional media. It was found that, rather than posing as a threat to traditional media outlets, new media has come at an opportune time for traditional media gatekeepers. It has helped to project their outlets by giving them more visibility and increasing their audience base. Another benefit of new media to radio online digital brand extensions is that it helps to diffuse their news stories, mainly because new media serves to hype the activities of the traditional media outlets.

- *Sub-theme 1 New media opportunities harnessed to increase news diffusion and audience bases*

The opportunities that new media has brought onto traditional media outlets is immense. The emergence of new media, as the interviews revealed, was never anticipated as a threat, but, rather, an opportunity to tap into the benefits it brings. These include, leveraging online audiences into the activities of the traditional media by serving their needs and encouraging them to diffuse their news content. Additionally, the advantages of new media, such as archiving, liking, sharing, tweeting and mentioning, were used as a basis to widely diffuse news generated from the newsroom. Such advantages were never derived with traditional media, as once you

miss the news broadcast you have no option to listen to it again. The following extracts from the interview transcripts gives credence to this position:

- I think it has completely transformed it from everything that has to do with how we communicate with our audiences, to getting audiences feedback, to conceiving programming ideas, to even different ways of monetizing our platforms and services [*Social Media Manager, citifmonline.com*].
- We have teamed up with new media staff to share news items first as in breaking news before traditional media (radio and TV). In fact, we have introduced the digital first agenda to enable us push all our news online first before radio and TV [*Online News Editor, myjoyonline.com*].
- Radio is transient because you listen to it and it is gone. Sometimes by the time you are done listening to the news, you even forget what you've heard. With the online, however, the news information is archived so people can take their time to access and read it after years of its publication, comment and argue on points presented. People can also interact with the news so we have had to ensure that every information we put out there is accurate [*Social Media Manager, peacefmonline.com*].
- Initially, when the online section of Citi started, we had the radio reporters going on the field for reports and these were converted into online news stories for publication on the website but because of competition, some things have changed. All media outlets want to maximize the opportunities given by the social media landscape to dominate the space for online news seekers to identify them. We now have a dedicated online news team called online journalists. It didn't use to be. Internally, we have employed more journalists who may not necessarily go to the field but be in the office to do follow-ups on the news on radio and the online space. They get the information and publish it on our website and social media that is how come all our radio and TV news ends up on our social media handles and websites. The digital media environment has thus impacted us positively to impact the space and impacted our internal arrangements and structures [*Online News Editor, citifmonline.com*].
- Radio is limited because of geographic space and location for the bandwidth. But social media and digital media have made it easier to reach a wider audience not only in Ghana but also outside. Because of that, it gives us additional responsibilities because working on social media requires more time and attention than the radio. You have to be interactive and also generate content that audiences will find interesting and engage with [*Social Media Curator, myjoyonline.com*].
- we have had to be proactive because we realised everyone was going digital and traditional media was no longer the point of call when there was "breaking news" or when people search for news. They often went online first, because it was found to be easily accessible. We therefore had to make a conscious effort to have it and also push for it. You also realise that it is very interactive so anytime audiences needed a response, we could provide it. So, it made more sense to invest in it [*Social Media Curator, myjoyonline.com*].

- So, for our regular programmes like the Super Morning Show, Cosmopolitan Mix and then News Night on Joy FM, for instance, what we do is that the social media executives listen to the show and tweet what is happening on the show. We also set up for the live show airing of our programmes on social media like Facebook for our online audiences [*Social Media Manager, myjoyonline.com*]
- *Sub-theme 2: New media is meant to hype the traditional media outlet*

Unlike online news media gatekeepers who operate only the online digital platforms, traditional media gatekeepers have new media or digital platform as an add-on to their traditional media outlet which was well established and grounded in the industry before the new media came on board. The new media is, thus, used as an amplifier of the traditional media by hyping the stories that are published for all to see. With just a click on social media, hundreds and thousands of people within a network will potentially receive a message. As such, it helps radio online digital brands to broadcast their news and other information to a wider audience than they would have originally achieved in their traditional media state. This is evidenced as below:

- We only use social media as a conduit to route traffic to the website. We don't get traffic to the website from traditional media so we send the headlines, pictures, links, first line of stories and sometimes catchy extracts from our website stories to social media. When people read the headline on social media, they are curious to click the link for the full story which then takes them to the website [*Online News Editor, citifmonline.com*].
- Social media most of the time is to generate attention and interest to drive traffic to the website. So whatever story we put on social media, we add the link to the website. Even if it is a story we are yet to develop, we inform them to visit [www.citifmonline.com](http://www.citifmonline.com) for details. On its own, the website does not generate enough traffic. The traffic often determines the revenue we receive when audiences stay to read stories and also we get companies advertising on our website [*Online News Editor, citifmonline.com*].
- Basically, it is amplification. I mean amplification of content on our traditional media outlets. We take whatever is on Joy FM and all our traditional media and put it out there to try and get more audiences [*Social Media Curator, myjoyonline.com*].

### 7.2.2.1.1.2 Theme 2: *The newsroom is the major source of information for new media platforms*

Radio online brand extensions in this study were found to operate a converged newsroom which served the traditional radio and television outlets as well as the new media outlet. Thus, providing consistent news and information output. This theme is further elaborated in the following sub-themes and interview extracts.

- *Sub-theme 1: Absolute dependence on newsrooms for news content for website and social media handles with little prerogative for staff of all categories*

The traditional media gatekeepers studied were found to publish the same news content on both traditional media outlets and the digital platforms. This is because the same newsroom served all their news outlets, both digital and traditional. Not only is this meant to reduce negative signalling costs like defamation suits, but it also ensures a close synergy between the activities of the different platforms within their group. This assertion is corroborated in the following interview extracts:

- When it comes to innovation, that we are allowed to, but it is the same content. We are still talking about the same content here, verified content, credible content...content from both sources that have gone through review already but how we present it is how we are free. So would you want to put just a video out there or a video with text, do we want to put in graphics or we would rather like our photographer to go out there and take pictures. That one we are allowed some room, but you would have to make sure that the company has given room for that or the newsroom has reported the story. For that one we stick to the story and there is no variation but how to present it, social media usually has an opportunity to just place it in an innovative way, however we place it. But for the content, it is what our newsroom churns out, news that is collated and verified by our newsroom. We don't deviate from that [*Social Media Manager, myjoyoline.com*].
- Our system is integrated. We have one newsroom that serves radio, TV and the new media. We have the reporters who also go out and source for news as part of a whole news gathering process. When they come back, a lot of these stories are also prepared for the online platforms, i.e., the website and social media. So, it is very integrated but a lot of the new media and online workers also get their own stories and do their own short videos, stories and things like that so it is a very integrated approach that we use [*Social Media Manager, citifmonline.com*].
- A lot of the materials for our content on the digital platforms are sourced locally or in-house. We have journalists on the field taking pictures, we have journalists

in all the regions as correspondents who offer some of the materials [*Social Media Manager, peacefmonline.com*].

- It is not as if we have separate newsrooms for the radio, TV and digital platforms. So sometimes, a story that an online writer will work on sometimes ends up being the headline or big story for say Eyewitness News or for Citi Newsroom. It is integrated like that and there is one News Editor who determines the stories that should go general on all our platforms [*Social Media Manager, citifmonline.com*].
- For social media, there is a team that will be ultimately responsible but obviously, they have to make sure that the words, grammatical construction and others are accurate. Once these things are done, we publish it across our platforms. Additionally, as a news organisation, if the editorial team agrees on what should be published on TV or radio, it will also find its way onto the website [*Social Media Manager, citifmonline.com*].
- You know we are all chasing the same audiences with our competitors and when there is some information, we cannot wait for radio to publish it before we do. Once we have verified it, it can be published even before radio publishes it the next hour as part of the news. A lot happens within the space of time between our hourly news on radio so the online or digital may serve to broadcast news as and when it is received or happens while radio will have to take time to gather and broadcast. There are, however, some instances where radio broadcasts it first and then we publish it online. However, sometimes when there is breaking news or information we receive, we sometimes put it first on social media for people to see and consume even before we develop the full stories for our websites. So sometimes, we have social media stories that do not go onto the website. But almost all our stories on our website also find its way to traditional and social media [*Social Media Curator, peacefmonline.com*].
- The digital or new media is subset of the newsroom so it is not autonomous. Just as we consolidate our news and most of our activities, our finances are also consolidated together. The digital or new media is a subset of the newsroom so it is not autonomous [*Online News Editor, citifmonline.com*].
- The model has changed over the years. Initially, we were autonomous so we could create our own content as well as create content for our digital brands. When we were autonomous, we were creating our own content so we could go out there, do our own interviews and put them out there online but as I said, this business model has changed and now we have become the mouthpiece for the traditional media brand so anything that goes on the traditional outlets of multimedia be it a TV show, a radio show or an online story on myjoyonline.com, you also find it on our social media handles. So, it is like an amplification medium of multimedia traditional media outlets [*Social Media Curator, myjoyonline.com*].

- Unless I want to go outside the scope of the organisational policies, everything is straight forward. Most of the time, our content is coming from radio and TV information which has been published on myjoyonline.com. And so, everything we put out on Twitter or social media is already available out there on myjoyonline.com. Very rarely do you find our handles interacting or putting content out there autonomously without provocation. Most of our post are heavily determined by what is going on in our newsroom [*Social Media Curator, myjoyonline.com*].
  - They are basically the same. We work in synergy so what happens on TV and radio, social media is there is amplify it. Almost nothing happens on air without it also going online or digital [*Social Media Curator, myjoyonline.com*].
  - All the stories you see there are a product of the newsroom. So even if you see an infographic talking about say a ministerial reshuffle, we did not gather or put it together. We picked it from the newsroom [*Social Media Manager, myjoyonline.com*].
  - If there is a rumour or an issue, does social media on our own accord go out there and choose to publish it? No, we wait on the newsroom. The newsroom is also advised by certain values and certain established dos and don'ts that exist so social media also follows such editorial principles. We may have content we want to put out there but it's not arbitrarily or it is not done anyhow. We follow the principles of the newsroom [*Social Media Manager, myjoyonline.com*].
- *Sub-theme 2: News undergoes rigorous editorial process before passing for publication*

Just like the traditional media outlet, news or information meant for the digital media also undergoes rigorous editorial scrutiny. Sometimes, information may be obtained from social media but it is not published until it is verified and taken through the editorial process. The following information from the interviews are evidential:

- We have an editor and we also have structures. When we receive a story, say an audio report, we write out the story. When we do a story, we put it at the backend. So based on experience, knowledge and our editorial policies, the editor vets the story for suitability. Once it is found to be suitable, we do the necessary checks, balances and verifications from the reporter and other sources, even from opposing sources to balance the story for our audiences. Sometimes I am not the only one who works on it, especially if the story has many sides. I have other sub-editors in the newsroom who assist with the verification and balancing [*Online News Editor, citifmonline.com*].

- We have a social media manager who handles the guidelines. There is a guideline that the social media team works with so this team follows the guideline and post accordingly. But if there is anything that needs to go out that has not been covered by the guideline, then we seek confirmation from the social media manager who can then seek confirmation from the programmes manager or the brands manager for confirmation and then it goes out [*Social Media Curator, myjoyoline.com*].
- All our stories, whether on air or digital, have gone through editorial review. It is the editors who decide which stories will generate brand visibility and so have to be published. We always want to be on a safer side so when our editors give accent, we publish and you may not know who may have issues with a story and where it can be taken. You always have to think about the reputation of the media outlet and the authenticity of the information being put out there. That is the reason we allow only stories that have been vetted by our editorial section to go out there. Our adherence to this has defined our brand position across Ghana and beyond the shores of Ghana [*Social Media Curator, myjoyoline.com*].
- For social media, there is a team that will be ultimately responsible but obviously, they have to make sure that the words, grammatical construction and others are accurate. Once these things are done, we publish it across our platforms [*Social Media Manager, citifmonline.com*].
- We communicate our brand to our audiences through all the content we broadcast on air and digitally. The content of text, the visual representations of what we put out there, that is the info-graphics, or any photographic or any graphics that we show have a certain brand identity and quality. Also, the quality of our writings. The very imperative that the content is right. There should not be any mistakes in the write-up that could bring down the image of the brand down [*Social Media Curator, myjoyonline.com*].

### **7.2.2.1.2 Branding strategies**

Branding strategies refers to the way the radio online digital brands use their gatekeeping activities to define how they want audiences and society to see them.

#### *7.2.2.1.2.1 Theme 1: Journalistic branding is emphasised rather than commercial branding*

As commercial entities, traditional media gatekeepers who also operate digital channels do not lose sight of the fact that they need to stay productive to meet their costs of operation. However, operating in a group serves to provide the needed financial support from other group members. This keeps them focused on the need to inform their audiences as their prime objective, instead of how to survive.



- *Sub-theme 1: Most news stories are mainly journalistic based: social, political, advocacy and environmental*

Most of the stories carried by traditional media gatekeepers are not paid stories or those that carry any monetary benefit to their outfits. Traditional media gatekeepers are aware that the longer audiences stay on their digital platforms, the more revenue they receive and this also serves as a motivation to provide informative and credible news to their audiences. This notwithstanding, the focus is not on the monetary benefits. Additionally, paid stories form only a small fraction of their entire stories covered. The following confirms this assertion:

- Our stories are purely journalistic, largely meant to inform our audiences and not financially tied [*Social Media Curator, myjoyoline.com*].
- Our stories are normally journalistic in nature to educate our audiences. Our priority is to be accurate on what we publish. Because you know what, you can't build a news organisation based on hype. We built a credible news organisation based on the accuracy and credibility of our news stories. It is not something that we are going to play around with just because we want to make money. Those things are just temporary, because the consumption culture of audiences change frequently and you can't be changing yourself like that all the time. You must stand for something, so we stand for accurate news, people news, verified news and that takes centre stage over everything. Even if it is an entertainment story, it must be factual and structured in such a way that it has all the necessary hallmarks of a good journalistic based story. So that one precedes everything else [*Social Media Manager, citifmonline.com*].
- We do a lot of advocacy. There are a number of advocacy activities we started back in 2017 before the government even took it up. We started our road safety campaign back in 2019. Even when Covid-19 came to the shores of Ghana, we were doing a lot of education. We spent a lot of time on radio between 3 and 4 pm everyday doing education on Covid. We also have been promoting agribusiness on radio on Fridays. We give about 30 minutes of our airtime to small and medium scale companies to promote their wares free of any charge. Our audiences love us for that, and those stories make us relevant. It is our relevance, credibility and advocacy stories that make people like us and associate with us. Sometimes when we go out and we mention that we are from Citi, the kind of respect that is accorded us makes us know that people appreciate us for what we do. It is not all about paid stories but the advocacy and social responsibility stories that matter [*Online News Editor, citifmonline.com*].

- For us, we have a brand. People know us to be a platform where they can get credible, relevant and timely information. So, we do not think more of the monetary gain, although it is also very necessary. The finances is always like the second thought because as journalists from a credible news outlet, ours is to inform people. Our information and news are always verified and credible. Even advertisers look out for brands that are well known and respected to place their ads so we first look at the credibility of our brand to create the monetary gains [*Online News Editor, peacefmonline.com*].
- Our news content outweighs any kind of paid content. We think more about informing our audiences. This is because, how many people or organisations will come in at a time to say they are doing a corporate social responsibility and so they would want us to help them? It is news that we would have covered anyway. But sometimes they want more coverage or they would want to come into the studio for interviews to talk about it. Those things are not enough to create content for a news item. Certainly, the largest percentage of news you hear is not paid. It is all that is in the public interest - corruption, social issues and the like. People even find those stories more topical and interesting. Certainly, that is where the chunk of our time, resources and efforts go. Those stories are for the people.... Especially knowing that someone is fighting their course in terms of road, water, electricity and healthcare for them, that is where they see the media house as relevant. From where I sit, I see that those stories are those that sit well with the people. If it becomes pay, pay, pay, everyday or you have paid activities only or PR stuff or only sponsored stuff, your platform becomes boring. Any day on our platform, proper news content is what we go for. Because we think of the masses in every of our dealings, a journalist wouldn't need money to cover social stories that are relevant community issues. At the end of the day, those are the stories that make us different. That is even where the joy of the profession comes from.... When you boast of being a staff of Joy FM or Multimedia, the joy of it lies in being able to serve the people and they acknowledging your efforts [*Social Media Manager, myjoyonline.com*].
- *Sub-theme 2: Market orientations are limited because their operations are converged, with integrated financing*

Digital media platforms operated by traditional media gatekeepers are not autonomous in their finances, branding and media-related activities. This limits the burden of focusing on generating enough revenue to remain viable and sustainable or support their activities. The finances of the individual outlets within the group are converged, without individual accounts and financial base. The following extracts emphasise this assertion:

- We haven't gotten to the point where the online section of Citi Newsroom can be autonomous. We depend on the revenue that is generated by the group [*Social Media Manager, citifmonline.com*].

- People know us to be a platform where they can get credible, relevant and timely information. So we do not think more of the monetary gain, although it is also very necessary. The finances is always like the second thought because as journalists and credible news outlet, ours is to inform people. Our information and news are always verified and credible. Even advertisers look out for brands that are well known and respected to place their ads so we first look at the credibility of our brand to create the monetary gains [*Online News Editor, peacefmonline.com*].
- We place a lot of content that is of interest to our audiences on social media. This makes them engage with us for long but that does not mean we are just monetizing our audiences. We are actually educating them, which is our core mandate. So though we yearn to stay profitable as a commercial entity, we also educate our audiences so it is sort of a hand-in-hand strategy and approach we adopt in releasing content to our new media platforms [*Social Media Manager, citifmonline.com*].
- Citi is a group. It is not just the online. We have the radio, the TV, the website, and we also have YouTube channels. So we have financial resources from adverts on TV, adverts on radio, adverts on the website, income from the YouTube channels and we also do programmes... We do the Sales Revolution and other programmes that help our finances. We sometimes have sponsorships as well to supplement our income from the adverts [*Online News Editor, citifmonline.com*].
- The digital or new media is a subset of the newsroom so it is not autonomous. Just as we consolidate our news and most of our activities, our finances are also consolidated together [*Online News Editor, citifmonline.com*].
- It is a business so sometimes we get finances flowing in from adverts which is enough to support our activities but sometimes too, we do not reach our target and have to depend on the traditional media for support. This does not happen often though. The sustainability of *myjoyonline.com* is not largely dependent on it as a business entity generating enough revenue to sustain itself. Sustainability is often not an issue because we have a number of organisations bringing in adverts. In the event where it is not able to, it is a group so revenue could be taken from elsewhere within the group to support our operations [*Social Media Curator, myjoyonline.com*].
- I know our social media handles generate some revenue but it is not as if that is our revenue and so the expenditure must fall within. All our revenue goes into the account or finances of the wider company because we are a group. We are not a self-paid section so everything we earn goes to the group account and our expenditure is also made within the budget estimates of the wider group [*Social Media Manager, myjoyonline.com*].
- Our system is integrated. So radio, TV, new media and all our platforms are integrated [*Social Media Manager, citifmonline.com*].

#### 7.2.2.2.1 Theme 2: I brand, you brand, we brand

The principle adopted in all the radio online digital brand extensions sampled in this study is; 'I brand, you brand, we brand'. Individually, each platform within the group is expected to brand itself using the generally accepted branding principles. And this ultimately translates into achieving the group branding vision. This is elaborated in the sub-themes below:

- Sub-theme 1: Activities performed by each news outlet within the group geared towards total group branding

Every activity undertaken by each platform, be it traditional or digital within the group, is ultimately aimed at building the brand for the group. Working in synergy helps to achieve this task because radio online digital brand extensions are always in tune with whatever happens with other news outlets within the group and they follow the same editorial guidelines and principles to achieve uniformity on the whole. So, once each platform within the group is diligent about branding itself within the branding tenets of the group, it results in total branding of the entire media brand.

- Our content strategy on social media is more of a brand building strategy because that is the only way we can make people and our audiences know what we stand for [*Social Media Curator, myjoyonline.com*].
- Our guideline is very journalistic in nature so it follows the general journalistic principles and our organisational policies. Because we are part of an organisation, we cannot choose to have different principles from that of the parent organisation. For instance, in quoting or citing, the guideline indicates that we do not have to paraphrase but if we do, we need to indicate that we are paraphrasing [*Social Media Curator, myjoyonline.com*].
- Across the cluster, there are different channels with different identities, however, we all aim at the same vision [*Social Media Manager, myjoyonline.com*].

- Sub-theme 2: Brand name and credibility of traditional media wing created over the years sells the online digital brand extension

It was obvious through the interviews with the traditional media gatekeepers sampled and they acknowledge that, the credibility of their parent brand or traditional media outlet has been the main brain behind achieving the recognition and following they have on the website and social media. Though this creates some competition, it also serves as a challenge to them to ensure that they do not fall short of the standards and foundation already laid. This was evidenced below:

- You can't build a news organisation based on hype. We built a credible news organisation based on the accuracy and credibility of our news stories. It is not something that we are going to play around with just because we want to make money. Those things are just temporary, because the consumption culture of audiences change frequently and you can't be changing yourself like that all the time. You must stand for something, so we stand for accurate news, people news, verified news and that takes centre stage over everything. Even if it is an entertainment story, it must be factual and structured in such a way that it has all the necessary hallmarks of a good journalistic based story. So that one precedes everything else [*Social Media Manager, citifmonline.com*].
- We are a credible news organisation so whatever information you hear or read on any of our platforms is credible. It is relevant and because of the competitive space we find ourselves, our news is timely information with accuracy. Sometimes when our audiences see some information on social media or another platform, they check that of *Citi* to verify the information. If it is not on *Citi*, then it is not a credible story but when they see it on *Citi*, then it means it is true. We have been able to create this brand for ourselves over the years and have lived up to it as well [*Online News Editor, citifmonline.com*].
- Sometimes people go onto other platforms for news and information but for them to confirm whether it is true, they come to our website, before they share. For us, when we interview people, we want to facts. We have facts and statistics and that is one area we rank high. We have a dedicated research department so our guests always try to do their homework well to avoid embarrassment. We don't look at the reputation of people, but we often ask relevant questions that our audiences seek answers to and this has helped to build our reputation over the years [*Online News Editor, citifmonline.com*].
- *Sub-theme 3: Content strategy on digital platforms considered a very essential brand building strategy*

The digital brand extensions of the traditional media gatekeepers interviewed were

found to play very key roles in projecting their news brands. The gatekeeping and content strategy adopted on the digital brands, i.e., the website and social media, are an essential brand building strategy to project the traditional media and the group as a whole. That informs the reason for the absolute dependence on the traditional media and newsroom for most of the information on the digital platforms.

- We do not just post information but we consider what the media organisation stands for [*Social Media Manager, citifmonline.com*].
- Because online is permanent and people can screenshot any information for keeps, we are particularly careful with the information we publish on our platform [*Online News Editor, myjoyonline.com*].
- For social media, there is a team that will be ultimately responsible but obviously, they have to make sure that the words, grammatical construction and others are accurate. Once these things are done, we publish it across our platforms. Additionally, as a news organisation, if the editorial team agrees on what should be published on TV or radio, it will also find its way onto the website [*Social Media Manager, citifmonline.com*].
- Relevance and authoritative is our goal through our digital content. How we have positioned ourselves informs our brand direction, it informs our brand position, and it informs the content we churn out on a daily basis [*Social Media Manager, peacefmonline.com*].
- That is why we post only verified and credible content. It enhances our brand positively and gives us a better position among our competitors. One thing that has projected our outlet is infographics. It serves to summarise and simplify very complex issues for our audiences to understand. In Ghana, Citinewsroom started infographics and others now do it. Such things do not give us any revenue per se, but it gives us brand awareness since those ones are shared very fast by our audiences and since it has our logo, people tend to know what we stand for and what we are good at [*Online News Editor, citifmonline.com*].
- Our audience take us serious because they know we only publish trusted stories that have been verified [*Online News Editor, myjoyonline.com*].
- We make sure any news item we share goes to project our online news portal, and most especially, the *Multimedia* brand [*Online News Editor, myjoyonline.com*].

- Our content strategy on social media is a more brand building strategy because that is the only way we can make people and our audiences know what we stand for [*Social Media Curator, myjoyonline.com*].
- All our stories whether on air or digital have gone through editorial review. It is the editors who decide which stories will generate brand visibility and so have to be published. We always want to be on a safer side so when our editors give accent, we publish and you may not know who may have issues with a story and where it can be taken. You always have to think about the reputation of the media outlet and the authenticity of the information being put out there. That is the reason we allow only stories that have been vetted by our editorial section to go out there. Our adherence to this has defined our brand position across Ghana and beyond the shores of Ghana [*Social Media Curator, myjoyonline.com*].
- During my tenure, one thing is also that whatever you are putting out there like funny videos, funny audios, funny content to make people laugh are not fancied. Everything that goes on out there should project the company; it should be about our programmes and what not. At first I had exercised some amount of liberty about these funny videos, I allowed the social media executives to put it there, everybody laughs and we saw it as a way to be engaging with our audiences but I think the time you will use to post that funny video, why don't you post something like aspects of the drama series on *Joy Prime* that will draw attention to that series and people will come and watch. So, everything we do is in line with what the brand stands for or what the company does. I think because social media is about content and there is an existing content policy on the company, why not? Just use the content policy as it is to guide your activities [*Social Media Manager, myjoyonline.com*].
- In the long run, it is the brand that we project so we may not want to meddle in all contents or put just anything out there. If the company is standing for credible news content from its sources, definitely, it trickles down to how social media chooses our content. If there is a rumour or an issue out, does social media on our own accord go out there and choose to publish it? No, we wait on the newsroom. The newsroom is also advised by certain values and certain established dos and don'ts that exist so social media also follows such editorial principles. We may have content we want to put out there but it's not arbitrarily or it is not done anyhow [*Social Media Manager, myjoyonline.com*].
- I think our gatekeeping and content strategies influence our brand positively for anybody who would want to use and access news that has been verified. For those who consume just any news at all without recourse to whether it's been verified or not, they do not have need for brands like ours. They just take whatever they are told without analysis or anybody perusing it ... those who listen to bloggers and opinions from people, do not have time for brands like ours... they will not have any better thing to say about us. But for us, every news we break is verified before it comes out. Even on our discussion segments on the Super Morning Show, News File and the others, we make sure we bring on board experts to help us with discussion of the issues. People who favour us positively often listen to us and are better informed to make decisions and choices out there [*Social Media Manager, myjoyonline.com*].

### 7.2.2.1.3 Signalling strategies

Signalling in this context and in the conceptual framework denote how media outlets make their audiences aware of their brand features or what the news outlet stands for.

Two main themes with sub-themes were generated for the signalling principles within the interview texts. The following sub-sections discuss them.

#### *7.2.2.1.3.1 Theme 1: News is seen as a critical business: content is geared towards the branding agenda*

The main purpose of broadcasting or online publishing is to inform, educate and entertain media audiences. Through its products, the media are able to make their audiences aware of what they stand for and that is what signaling is all about. News, for instance, is geared towards an agenda and so every activity within the chain or news process is attended to with the greatest importance. For example, some Online News Editors confirmed that even in publishing humorous videos, it is done purposively so that their brand and reputation is not damaged.

- Sometimes, and from time to time, we put out short videos for our audiences to engage with. These are not out of context funny videos, but those which are news related. I remember when we were covering the Supreme Court case early this year, Mettle Nunoo was being interviewed via video conferencing platform and a judiciary officer was dispatched to monitor him so the case dragged and the supreme court judge asked him whether the judiciary officer was given lunch. It was just a funny video. Tsatsu Tsikata responded that he didn't do that because if he did, people may interpret it that he is influencing the judicial officer. I mean it was a small joke but we put the video on social media and we had a lot of engagement on our social media platforms. There was another one with Mettle Nunoo where the EC's lawyers said that when he went to meet Mrs. Jean Mensah, he was given tea and biscuit and he said no, he was given only tea without biscuit. It was also a funny joke but news related. We put such videos there not only to get engagement on our platforms but also within the context of news. Such stories are posted to generate engagement [*Online News Editor, citifmonline.com*].
- During my tenure, one thing is also that whatever you are putting out there like funny videos, funny audios, funny content to make people laugh are not fancied. Everything that goes on out there should project the company; it should be about our programmes and what not. At first I had exercised some amount of liberty about these funny videos, I allowed the social media executives to put it there, everybody laughs and we saw it as a way to be engaging with our audiences but I think the time you will use to post that funny video, why don't you post something like aspects of the drama series on Joy Prime



that will draw attention to that series and people will come and watch. So, everything we do is in line with what the brand stands for or what the company does. I think because social media is about content and there is an existing content policy on the company, why not? Just use the content policy as it is to guide your activities [*Social Media Manager, myjoyonline.com*].

- When it comes to innovation, that we are allowed to, but it is the same news content. We are still talking about the same content here, verified content, credible content...content from both sources that have gone through editorial review already but how we present it is how we are free to be innovative. So would you want to put just a video out there or a video with text, do we want to put it in graphics or we would rather like our photographer to go out there and take pictures .... That one we are allowed some room. So, if there is a story that the Honourable member of Parliament for Tema, Mr. Carlos Ahenkorah has snatched and run away with a ballot box, will you want to show a photo of Carlos running away or you would rather want to show a video of Carlos running away... or you would want to make it a cartoon? That is entirely up to you but you would have to make sure that the company has given room for that or the newsroom has reported that Carlos grabbed the ballot box and run away. For that one we stick to the story and there is no variation but how to present it, social media usually has an opportunity to just place it in an innovative way. But for the content, it is what our newsroom churns out, news that is collated and verified by our newsroom. We don't deviate from that [*Social Media Manager, myjoyonline.com*].

- *Sub-theme 1: Positive signalling costs are enhanced through employing qualified staff to various positions*

In the conceptual framework in Chapter Five, positive signaling costs were identified as positive actions undertaken by media outlets to reduce unnecessary costs that will impact their finances and production costs negatively. Through interviews with the Social Media Managers, Online News Editors and Social Media Curators within the traditional media, it was observed that the right caliber of staff with the required number were employed to fill all the positions within the news chain. This does not leave any staff over-burdened with activity. As such, they are assigned responsibilities based on qualifications and expertise and it is easy to hold them accountable. The following extract from the interview confirm this:

- Internally, we have employed more journalists who may not necessarily go to the field but be in the office to do follow-ups on the news on radio and the online space. They get the information and publish it on our website and social media that is how come all our radio and TV news ends up on our social media handles and websites. The digital

media environment has thus impacted us positively to impact the space and impacted our internal arrangements and structures [Online News Editor, citifmonline.com].

- *Sub-theme 2: Negative signalling costs are discouraged by crosschecking facts before broadcast or publishing*

To reduce or do away with negative signalling costs such as suits of slander and defamation that will lead to lawsuits, information received, whether from reporters, online, social media or audiences is cross-checked or verified before publishing or broadcasting. This has given the traditional media gatekeepers interviewed the credibility and brand position they command. The following extracts are confirmatory:

- We communicate our brand to our audiences through all the content we broadcast on air and digitally. The content of text, the visual representations of what we put out there, that is the info-graphics, or any photographic or any graphics that we show have a certain brand identity and quality. Also, the quality of our writings. The very imperative that the content is right. There should not be any mistakes in the write-up that could bring down the image of the brand down [Social Media Curator, myjoyonline.com].
- It is lovely and it feels good to know that people are reading your work and it encourages you to do better so you can't mess up. If people are checking what you are doing, it is gratifying and refreshing but it also puts us in check to ensure that whatever information we are churning out is credible. If it is not credible, no one will share and you will be tagged with a bad brand name [Online News Editor, citifmonline.com].
- Stories should pass the basic journalistic standards: factual and verified [Online News Editor, peacefmonline.com].
- Our Twitter handle is a critical brand that informs rather than just entertain. We have entertainment aspect but the critical and informative aspects of our brand reigns supreme. We ensure that every content we put out there is verified and credible. We do not cook or make up stories [Social Media Curator, myjoyonline.com].
- All our stories whether on air or digital have gone through editorial review. It is the editors who decide which stories will generate brand visibility and so have to be published. We always want to be on a safer side so when our editors give accent, we publish and you may not know who may have issues with a story and where it can be taken. You always have to think about the reputation of the media outlet and the authenticity of the information being put out there. That is the reason we allow only stories that have been vetted by our editorial section to go out there. Our adherence

to this has defined our brand position across Ghana and beyond the shores of Ghana [*Social Media Curator, myjoyonline.com*].

#### 7.2.2.1.3.2 Theme 2: Brand awareness is hyped through social/non-studio programmes

Traditional media gatekeepers do not only create brand awareness through their broadcast or publication. They also do so through the credibility of their stories, as well as social/non-studio programmes, sometimes with audiences attending. This is a way to get their audiences involved in what they do and to generate loyalty. Aside from in-studio engagement, there are social out-of-studio programmes to connect with audiences and make them feel like a part of the media organization.

- *Citi* is a group. It is not just the online. We have the radio, the TV, the website, we also have YouTube channels. We do programmes that bring us closer to our audiences. I have realised it is the best way to grow loyalty among media audiences. Before Covid 19, in December we had a programme called D2R (December to Remember), In March we have the Heritage month where we do the caravan where we tour all the regions of the country. We do the Sales Revolution and other programmes that help our finances and brings our audiences to our doorsteps. It is not just about the staying in the study. We meet to share stuff with our audiences [*Online News Editor, citifmonline.com*].
- Joy FM or Multimedia is not just a business but a family. We have a way of getting our audiences closer to us to build brand loyalty. It is not only about the news we send to them but we organise programmes where they attend and we have one-on-one interactions. For instance, during Easter, we have the Easter Soup Kitchen where our audiences contribute and we have sponsorship to reach out to the less privileged in society. We also have the Joy Bridal Fair where we bring actors in the hospitality and event planning industry together for our audiences to interact with. We also have the Joy Business Fair where we bring businesses under one umbrella to interact with our audiences, also cervical cancer awareness week annually where we bring professionals to screen our audiences for free, we organise health walks and a host of other programmes as well which run all year through [*Social Media Manager, myjoyonline.com*].

#### 7.2.2.1.4 News diffusion strategies

The multiple news outlets operated by traditional media gatekeepers are a strategic brand positioning scheme that gives them a solid advantage over their competitors in diffusing their news stories to different audience segments. Additionally, it has

increased their audience-base because, aside from their traditional audience outlets, they have leveraged online and social media audiences. Each news outlet, that is, the TV, radio and the website, have their own host of social media platforms and handles. This is a way to increase information sources for media audiences and ensure that the news from these media organisations get to as wide an audience as possible. The following themes and sub-themes generated emphasise how the advantages of new media have been deployed to enhance the news diffusion and dissemination by traditional media brands.

#### *7.2.2.1.4.1 Theme 1: Enhanced news diffusion strategies*

Rather than posing a threat, as suggested by some literature, traditional media outlets have harnessed new media advantages to project their outlets and diffuse their news stories. They have adapted new media into their traditional media practices to widely disseminate their news content to existing and new audiences. The following sub-themes amplify and elaborate this position.

- Sub-theme 1: Individual outlets within the group have separate social media accounts to create increased news diffusion and engagement with audiences

Aside from the traditional media, new media brand extensions operating as additions to the traditional media have greatly harnessed the advantages of new media to the benefit of traditional media gatekeepers to engage with and diffuse their news stories. All of the traditional media gatekeepers interviewed in this study are affiliated to a news organisation that encompasses a radio outlet (sometimes multiple), television outlet and then a website. All these individual media types have their unique host of social media outlets to publish the stories and programmes being aired at any particular time.

This amplifies the traditional media programmes positively and also provides additional outlets for news diffusion. The following extracts are instructive:

- Sometimes, engagement is programme-based. We put various programmes on all social media handles, sometimes live on Facebook and then we put headlines, videos, images and links on Twitter for audiences to engage with [*Social Media Manager, peacefmonline.com*].
- We operate Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. For these social media platforms, we have them for each of our news outlets. So, radio has its own Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube handles, the same for TV and the website. We have done this and we aggregate all to get the needed traffic. Also, we have different programmes running on all our different platforms at particular times. So if we had just one and wanted to livestream, how will that go for both radio and TV. Each programme has its own to meet the needs of the audiences on that outlet. We have different people tweeting information on the Twitter handles based on the news platform so at each time we have tweets on the Twitter handle based on the radio programme airing, the same for TV and the information on our website. It helps us to get more audiences onto the website. So, if for instance Citi FM is doing for instance Citi Breakfast Show, they have different information on their own social media platforms from Citi TV which may be doing Breakfast Day. They all have different hosts and sometimes topics for discussion. So, we tweet and post all information in real time [*Online News Editor, citifmonline.com*].
- One thing is that, we don't only use this strategy to get people on the website but also to project our programmes and platforms. We also have sound cloud, a platform where we put our audio content. So, we make sure we edit the sound bites from our radio programmes and we put it on the platform because we know that not everybody will be listening to our programmes in real time or at a particular point in time and there are other people who may be outside the country or where our radio frequency may not reach or outside our jurisdiction but would like to listen to us. We use some of these platforms to push our content so that people who couldn't listen at a particular time may listen at their own convenient time. It is sort of a podcast platform. For YouTube too, whatever video content we have, be it TV or whatever, we push it on our YouTube channel and then use our other social media handles to push it to get more people to view. It also gives us some form of income. We sometimes use Anchor which is another social media platform and sometimes Snapchart [*Online News Editor, citifmonline.com*].
- Yes, we engage with our audiences a lot. That is like the core of how we are able to stay up in the trend. For this year, the Super Morning Show on Joy FM and multimedia is always fun. If you take Twitter, we have #Finemorning, #AM Show, #JoySMS for our Joy cluster of news outlets and we have #Daybreak hits, which belongs to Hitz FM. Now what happens is that while we are tweeting and telling you what is happening on the show, we also tell you that if what we are discussing is of interest to you or you've experienced what we are discussing, besides the WhatsApp and phone-ins, you can tweet at us and use these hashtags. We collect all tweets attached to these hashtags. We link up with producers and presenters to read out these tweets. So, you tweet and you can hear your tweet being read out on Super Morning Show ... There is a lot of engagement. Our audiences are our greatest asset. We do everything to keep them.

We run promotions and surveys to find out their opinions about issues concerning our brand [*Social Media Manager, myjoyonline.com*].

- What we do is that we make our audiences interact with our programmes, events, personalities, segments and what not. There are different units for different points of interaction. So, if you happen to be interacting with us using #JoySMS using the hashtag, and you are referring to the content, certainly it is the #JoySMS social media executive you are interacting with. If you are interacting with us during a show like #Night Street Jam, of course it is not #JoySMS you are talking to us about but #Night Street Jam. So, it is not just one person or social media platform. It is whoever is manning that particular show or shift that you are interacting with. So, if you sent a content during a particular show, it is the social media executive who acts... he needs to send it to the producer. If there is a response he needs to give, he follows-up and gives the feedback [*Social Media Manager, myjoyonline.com*].
- Sub-theme 2: Audiences are considered highly inclusive in the news diffusion agenda

The media business is about audiences, and media audiences are now considered partners in the business. Every media institution will do anything to ensure that they reach as wide an audience as possible. In the digital era, media audiences are the most cherished partners in diffusing news stories to their contacts within other networks. Thus, helping the media outlet reach an audience they may otherwise not reach. It is obvious that the institutions interviewed are aware of this and so they cherish that partnership, using it to their advantage.

- Because a lot of our audiences are on social media, we engage them by sharing a lot of our content there. We do short text, picture stories videos and audios [*Online News Editor, myjoyonline.com*].
- So, it is not something we can just wish that it works out. It is a result of continuous conscious effort to work at a strategy that will get us the audiences and also to monetize our audiences and platforms as well as get our stories widely diffused [*Social Media Manager, citifmonline.com*].
- Engagement of audiences is the name of the game. Every content we produce is not for us, but for the audiences. So everything that we do is meant to engage the audiences [*Social Media Manager, citifmonline.com*].
- That is what we always hope for and our audiences really do send out our stories on other platforms. Anyone who owns or runs information or business on a platform knows

that the audiences would be the main people to project the business for you. There is nothing better than word of mouth. Our new media platforms like the website and social media platforms have these monitoring plug-ins connected to it. The backend helps us to see which stories people click on frequently, etc., it is pretty easy to get that information [*Social Media Manager, citifmonline.com*].

- Our audiences, most of the time, are those who spread our news for us. They tweet and share with friends and family. The truth is that, the acceptance and propagation of news often depends on the education level and understanding of the audiences about social media platforms. For now, what people do is that they retweet or share and that is the culture. So, depending on how informed our audiences are, they also adapt themselves [*Social Media Manager, peacefmonline.com*].
- Our audiences are our main source of news diffusion. We sometimes have even the politicians themselves sharing our political stories on their timelines and elsewhere. Former President Mahama and President Nana Addo have on several occasions shared our stories on Facebook and Twitter. Kojo Opong Nkrumah always shares our stories on his social media handles [*Online News Editor, citifmonline.com*].
- It depends on the particular story. If it is a big story, like the Death of former President Rawlings, the rate of propagation is enormous. That one for instance almost collapsed our system. Because the traffic was just too much for our system. We didn't anticipate such heavy traffic. What they do is that when they get the stories, they also send out to other people who also want to confirm and this creates a lot of traffic [*Online News Editor, citifmonline.com*].
- All our stories are meant to engage with our audiences, however, stories on social media rank high on engagement. That is why we put catchy headlines, links and pictures there for our audiences. Our audiences are such that because they know the kind of information we churn out, they have confidence in engaging with our stories by retweeting and mentioning them to others. They also sometimes engage with us by sending comments which we gladly respond to [*Online News Editor, citifmonline.com*].
- Sometimes our audiences diffuse our stories, but other times, it doesn't work out the way you want it. But when they do, it really goes [*Social Media Curator, myjoyonline.com*].
- It is quite okay. On average, and basing position on our followers, an average story which is not a breaking news can have about 30% of our followers engaging with it. If it is a breaking news story or a big story, we could get about 70% or more. Some people just visit the website or social media to consume news but not to interact. Breaking news stories often produce more engagement than follow-up stories or normal social and entertainment news [*Social Media Curator, myjoyonline.com*].

- Our audiences are good propagators of the content on our media brand. That is one thing about hosting an online audience. The moment they see something they like, they retweet it, mention it to others and carry it beyond where we could send it. They have that core function. One thing I have realised is that our audiences don't just consume information we put out there. They share it with others within their networks [*Online News Editor, peacefmonline.com*].
- We do a lot to engage with our audiences at various levels. Sometimes in music selection for our shows, we engage with our audiences to sometimes vote to select artistes whose music they would like to hear on our shows. We just do these to ensure that we make the audiences a part of what we are doing. This makes them comfortable to share our brand with others [*Social Media Manager, myjoyonline.com*].
- Sub-theme 3: Systems have been put in place to check analytics of news diffusion on social media

The digital platforms used by media outlets are designed to generate statistics of audience online activities at the back end. This makes it easy to track progress of story propagation or diffusion by media audiences. The following extracts elaborate on this position:

- We have the analytics at the back end of our website and social media handles and we are able to check the analytics to find out the kind of people that come on our website. It is not a particular class of audiences that visit. People from all walks of life and countries come to our website [*Online News Editor, citifmonline.com*].
- The website analyses visitors on the site but social media gives analytics of the transmission of our stories and headlines or which people are engaging with your posts. On Twitter, we are able to know the number of retweets, mentions and comments. Facebook also gives us those who liked or commented on our stories. So, it gives us real time data [*Online News Editor, citifmonline.com*].
- Yes, we have certain software that track engagement or activities and actions on social media, across all media. We have a system on all our social networks and it does all the tracking for us. It has an analytic component that provides us with the statistics of engagement and activities online on our social media handles [*Social Media Curator, myjoyonline.com*].
- A lot of the data we have was not generated during surveys, these online platforms have analytic software crawling the pages, finding out who is visiting, when they are visiting, how many minutes they are visiting among other things [*Social Media Manager, myjoyonline.com*].



- Our new media platforms like the website and social media platforms have these monitoring plug-ins connected to it. The backend helps us to see which stories people click on frequently, etc. It is pretty easy to get that information [*Social Media Manager, peacefmonline.com*].
- Twitter has an analytic system that allows you to see the number of retweets and engagements. Facebook also has that... like watching your live stream and all that. We have to deploy that system if we want to see the analysis per time. The rate of propagation differs. However, some programmes can have over 100 retweets. About 150 maximum looking at the way our audience engagement is per programme and channel [*Social Media Curator, peacefmonline.com*].

The section that follows considers the themes and sub-themes generated from the interview transcripts of online news media gatekeepers.

#### 7.2.2.2 Data presentation of semi-structured interviews for solely digital media brands

**Table 7.9: Themes and sub-themes generated for the analysis of the transcripts generated from the semi-structured interviews for online news media gatekeepers**

Themes	Themes	Sub-themes
<b>Gatekeeping strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gatekeeping flexibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Story selection is largely based on creating engagement to prolong audiences' online stay.</li> <li>• News selection and writing is purposively customised based on media channel intended for publication and to achieve desired impact.</li> <li>• Maximum amount of freedom exercised at all levels of gatekeeping.</li> <li>• External influence on gatekeeping – Financiers and audiences.</li> <li>• Audience feedback considered essential and leads to story selection and follow-up.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gatekeeping is dependent on brand-building strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Type of gatekeeping influences brand of media outlet positively.</li> </ul>

<b>Branding Strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management or Commercial branding emphasised</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small/medium scale business entities.</li> <li>• Financing based largely on adverts and retention of audiences online.</li> </ul>	
<b>Signalling strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brand communication is limited</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Careful selection of news stories to publish to communicate a positive brand.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understaffing leading to incurring negative signalling costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inadequate staffing due to high cost of labour leading to multi-tasking.</li> <li>• Heavy dependence on external news sources.</li> <li>• Understaffing sometimes lead to not being able to meet deadlines and losing opportunities to connect with audiences.</li> </ul>	
<b>News Strategies</b>	<b>Diffusion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited news diffusion options</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audience engagement is very relevant in news diffusion.</li> <li>• Audiences are considered as highly inclusive in the news diffusion agenda and systems have been put in place to track their activities.</li> </ul>

### 7.2.2.2.1 Gatekeeping Strategies

#### 7.2.2.2.1.1 Theme 1: Gatekeeping flexibility

The gatekeeping strategies undertaken by online media gatekeepers in building their brands were found to be driven by five trajectories, which were developed into sub-themes for easy handling. These were developed based on: how information is sourced for inclusion in the news; how gatekeeping is done; who has influence on news content; and, finally, how news is made available to the public. The main theme 'gatekeeping flexibility' was developed when it was realised that on all five trajectories, online news media gatekeepers have a prerogative in taking certain decisions and actions. This was also so because, often, the ownership of the online news outlet was sole proprietorship, and the owner was also a staff member. The following sub-

sections give detailed explications of the sub-themes generated.

- *Sub-theme 1: Story selection is largely based on creating engagement to prolong audiences online stay*

For online news media gatekeepers who work in solely digital or online news media organisations without traditional media affiliation, story selection was found to be directly linked to the finances or financial position of the news organisations. This is because these establishments are often small-scale businesses with less than five employees who depend solely or partially on the finances of the news organisation for their livelihoods. This makes the sustenance and survival of the news organisation prime and key. To this end, stories are selected based on what will attract audiences to engage for longer periods or stay on the platforms for longer. In support of the above trajectory and assertion, these were some of the key representational sampled comments given by the interviewees:

- When we give different titles to the various contents we share on different platforms, it provides variety. It is possible that someone is following you on Twitter and has read that content and seen the link alright with an image. When the person goes to say Facebook, he may see a different inscription for the same story. The person may read it again but if it is the same heading and content, the person may ignore it. But the different inscription may make the person feel like it is new and they will open it to read. We sometimes do this integrated marketing strategies just to ensure that though we are sharing different information, they all arrive at the same web page so that we generate the needed traffic [*Online News Editor, newsghana24.com*].
- We frame our stories such that, they are all engaging. We do so by putting up catchy headlines, suggestive images and pictures that implicitly and explicitly give meaning to our stories, as well as catchy phrases within our stories. These are done to make our audiences visit our website in the first place, and then stay longer reading contents [*Online News Editor, modernghana.com*].
- The financial benefits is an essential part of our stories on our website to route traffic and increase our finances but we also consider bringing the best to our audiences. We are not in just for the traffic but also to bring credible and unique news content to our audiences [*Social Media Manager, mynewsghana.net*].

- The more attractive news stories and headlines we put up to engage your audiences, the more income we also generate to finance our activities [*Social Media Manager, mynewsghana.net*].
- *Sub-theme 2: News selection and writing is purposively customised based on media channel intended for publication and to achieve desired impact*

The plug-ins of the websites operated by online digital news media outlets were designed such that, once they published stories on their websites, the stories were automatically published on their social media handles. However, most of them have adjusted the automatic plug-ins to customise these to their needs. Sometimes, they publish stories manually on social media to achieve the desired gatekeeping impact on society. Sometimes, there is a need to stress a story to achieve maximum diffusion, thus, it may be published about three times on social media. In such situations, the news organisation may not publish the story three times on the website for that effect, but may manually publish it two other times on social media to achieve the desired effect. This means that, after the first automatic publication on social media from the website plug-ins, subsequent publications on social media are done manually. Sometimes, this gives room to re-frame stories using appropriate or suitable wording that will achieve the intended results regardless of how often the same story is re-published for emphasis. To add to this, some stories were developed with content and wording that will suit particular outlets so that they are not generic stories but customised to suit the outlet. The following are some responses that affirm this position.

- For the stories that go on our social media handles, we tell our writers about the stories that we want there so they are able to turn the stories around for whichever social media handle we desire. For instance if it is a political news story or football, we know the particular social media handle to send it to. There are categories of stories for each social media account based on the interest of the audiences there [*Social Media Curator, mynewsghana.net*].

- When our stories are put on our website, it has been programmed such that automatically, it goes to Twitter. However, we sometimes put stories on the Twitter account directly without publishing on the website. Such stories are to generate audience engagement [*Social Media Manager, mynewsghana.net*].
- When we write a story, it first goes to our website, mynewsghana.com. Then from the website, our bloggers begin to share the stories to our social media handles. That is where if you are sharing the story on Facebook, you go to groups. When there is a story about Shatta Wale, we will not put it in a political group because if we do, we will not get much going on because there is no interest of Shatta Wale there. Then you will have to target the groups or audiences that are fans of Shatta Wale then you put it there [*Social Media Manager, mynewsghana.net*].
- Although we chat and engage our audiences sometimes on social media, the stories we put there are for the masses. Twitter for instance, we don't have selective stories for publishing but with Facebook, there are groups where you can look for interest areas and publish [*Social Media Manager, modernghana.com*].
- The stories we publish on our outlets are not very different, except on the part of media. For Twitter, a lot of media content like pictures and video goes there, unlike the website. Sometimes, we even post a document that come with a story...for instance if there is a press release, the document that accompanies the press release from the organisation will be posted on Twitter and then link it to the article on our website. So, a user on Twitter can have first-hand access to that document on Twitter. But on our website, the person would have to click on our Twitter handle to be able to download that document [*Online News Editor, modernghana.com*].
- If the article is to go with text, media, pictures or other documents, we consider all these things since the website can accommodate all these attachments. On social media especially Twitter, it will not allow us to put up so much text because of the text limitations they put on Twitter posts so over there, the whole thing will be centred on Twitter's own policies and the restrictions there. We also consider the audiences we have on Twitter as well to be able to post content for Twitter audiences [*Social Media Curator, mynewsghana.net*].
- The stories on our website are not different from the social media except for media files. Sometimes, if we have video content of an incident that has happened and we need to publish it, we can put the entire video file on YouTube, which is also a social media platform, even if it is one hour and then write a brief thing about the video. But on our website, we can just give the details of the actual issue and then publish it without the video or sometimes directing the reader to the YouTube video. So on social media, you want to show more on content because people don't want to read more on social media [*Social Media Manager, modernghana.com*].
- With the social media, sometimes I do it manually, which is very consistent. It means that when I publish something, I have to share it on all the relevant social media

handles. Sometime in the past, what I was doing on social media was that, I was doing automatic publications. That is to say that I connected the website with what we call plug-in so that the moment an article is published on the website, automatically it is shared on Twitter, Facebook and other social media handles so that I don't keep going back and forth. There are times that it has to be done manually so that at least those who did not see it during the first share will see it the second or the third. For very important news, sometimes we break them severally on social media [*Online News Editor, newsghana24.com*].

- For our contents on social media and the website, they are the same. What I mean by the automatic and manual is that, because of the connection or plug-ins we have on the website, for instance, there is a plug-in that permits instant publication of new content that we publish on our website on social media as well. Sometimes, when it goes there, the algorithms of the social media outlet may think that the rate at which it is coming, it is a robot, but you have actually applied artificial intelligence. Artificial intelligence may not be always as slow as we expect. We expect that every three minutes, you publish like one content but you may have three or more people working on the website at the same time and so within one minute, they could all be publishing a content at the same time. And as they all appear instantly, the social media handles may for instance block your access to delivering news because they may think you are a robot. That is why we publish some straight away and for others, we uncheck the automatic publication plug-in then we copy the link and share manually so that we don't allow the system to prevent us because when they prevent us, it will take us a maximum of one month to be allowed again and that will mean losing contact with your readers [*Online News Editor, newsghana24.com*].

- *Sub-theme 3: Maximum amount of freedom is exercised at all levels of gatekeeping*

Social Media Curators and Managers who operate in solely online media organisations have some amount of flexibility or freedom to exercise their discretion and initiative in selecting stories for publication online, especially on social media to aid the brand-building activities of their news organisations. Sometimes there is only one person or two people who manage a news outfit and may be assigned different tasks. This leaves the Social Media Curator with maximum freedom to decide what they feel would benefit their audiences and also build their brand. Editorial decisions, in those instances, are vested with an individual. The following interview extracts give credence to this position:

- With my duty as Social Media Manager, I exercise some prerogative in the publication of stories. I decide on content and I can schedule a time for the release of stories based on the attention I want to attract. For instance, in the 2020 elections that were just held, if I was, for instance, privileged to have information as to who won it even before the EC comes out publicly to mention it, being the Social Media Manager, I can inform the writers that I have scheduled the story for a particular time so they can plan their writing and editing with the set time. This will help me achieve my set purpose by getting the right people to view that particular story. So, I have some freedom to take initiative of giving accounts of stories to my audiences. Sometimes there are trending stories which audiences will be looking out for updates so even if you have another story, you cannot put it there until after some time [*Social Media Manager, mynewsghana.net*].
  
- For the content that goes online, we have them in two sections. Due to legal issues, there are category of news stories that can go online without actually going through any screening whatsoever, as long as it comes from a reporter that is working with us. There other categories of stories that cannot go online except a top-level executive has actually approved it, especially in the case of politics. If I find a news item like an accident or any happening in town that I think is news worthy, I can just go ahead and get it published directly onto the platform. But if I find a news article that I know this is a political issue and based on my experience I think this thing can actually go viral, I have to contact somebody at the top-level executive to approve of it before the story can go live. So there are two sections – more flexible articles like sports and entertainment can go freely but political issues and related issues cannot go like that [*Online News Editor, mynewsghana.net*].
  
- The freedom is within the trending stories and what our audiences want. Also, the freedom is not without bounds. We consider the truth of the story and also what is good to go out there [*Social Media Manager, mynewsghana.net*].
  
- There is absolute freedom on social media compared to the website. A lot of the posts on social media do not need editorial decisions or permission from Management or the higher-level executives [*Social Media Curator, mynewsghana.net*].
  - *Sub-theme 4: External influence on gatekeeping – Financiers and audiences*

The financial base of solely online news media outlets in Ghana is not very strong. This endangers their survival and makes them prone to financial challenges because they are small or medium businesses and are not able to attract many advertisements due to the low traffic they experience. This affects their finances, and any major

financier could influence the credibility and the kind of stories they publish. This is evident in the following responses:

- For now, we do not have adverts coming in. There is one thing about getting advertisements from businesses. What they look out for is that your brand should have super traffic. Brands that very often get advertisements coming in have not less than 100,000 visitors a day. Because, when businesses put their adverts there, they also expect the returns and so they will ask questions like “what is the minimum traffic you generate a day?” I have had opportunities like that from the US and UK and they ask questions like “so what is the traffic situation on your platform like?” For those people, the traffic they were expecting was like a minimum of 20,000 a day but our traffic hits about 15,000 a day or as low as 1000 on some days so you don’t get volume in there. But even with that traffic we get, sometimes, I get friends and some smaller businesses who want to advertise their products or services on the website. And for them, it is just a token just to put them out there and give them that leverage for the mile they want to go so that others can also see what they are doing [*Online News Editor, newsghana24.com*].
- The survival of our news organisation depends on advertisers because they are our major financiers. The survival is about 90% from advertisers. The remaining 10% comes from organisations we have partnerships and those we work hand in hand with [*Online News Editor, mynewsghana.net*].
- Yes, that is why we cannot do those top-level articles without the top-level executives consent. You know, sometimes it’s not political but...I quite remember there was a communication about a bank and a TV station that had dismissed their staff without any notice. I particularly had that article because a lady who was sacked sent me copies of their dismissal letters and all that. I drafted a publication that I was about publishing but unfortunately, I was told to bring it down because the bank in question had a partnership with our platform so we just had to bring the article down. So sometimes, those things also influence our stories [*Online News Editor, mynewsghana.net*].
- Information come from people, so inasmuch as you do your research, there are times you need to get audiences views on issues. When they say it, you don’t just use it. You try to do your background checks to confirm before using it [*Social Media Manager, modernghana.com*].
- Sometimes, for adult content, you can see news portals doing it but due to the kind of audiences we have and because of our past experiences, our audiences prefer better than adult content so we cannot do that. So our audiences have influenced the kind of stories and articles that we do [*Online News Editor, mynewsghana.net*].
- At *Mynewsghana.net* we cover all stories – politics, entertainment, education etc. Because we deal with our readers, we mostly listen to what they want, and then based on that, we do stories and bring to them. We also bring to them news and information about events happening around. We basically consider trending news and what our



audiences want [*Social Media Manager, mynewsghana.net*].

- If we are posting on Twitter, it is not solely for information purposes like our website. Sometimes we just want to post something engaging so we might just consider the fact that we are always trying to push news to the audiences. We always want to give them what they will like. The major consideration is not to post content that will stain the reputation of the platform, but anything engaging goes [*Online News Editor, newsghana24.com*].
- *Sub-theme 5: Audience feedback considered essential and leads to story selection and follow-up*

Online news media gatekeepers may not have it all in terms of staffing, as they may not have reporters and correspondents in all parts of the country. They sometimes, in such instances, rely on audiences who pose as ‘citizen journalists’. Additionally, the comments and feedback from their audiences serve as leads into other angles to stories they may have published already. They also help them to know the stories of interest to audiences, and then they follow it up. This claim is emphasised by the following extracts from the interview transcripts:

- When we do stories, there is a part that audiences bring out their views and comments. Sometimes, we get to engage with them if they have another view to the story or they have other detailed information. I remember we were doing a story yesterday about an incident that happened at Aseduase. We posted it on our social media handle and one guy made us aware that there is a new twist to the story. So we got the information from him and used it to update our article [*Social Media Manager, mynewsghana.net*].
- On Twitter, sometimes, issues happen that do not even concern us. Sometimes, people post things you think are doors because as a news organisation, we get most of the information first-hand. So, if we are a brand and we stand for say, authenticity, and we have seen something on social media, we can go ahead and talk about it, comment, retweet it and like it. This is just so that anybody who sees it will know that indeed this person or our platform is an authentic news portal [*Social Media Curator, mynewsghana.net*].
- Information come from people, so inasmuch as you do your research, there are times you need to get audiences views on issues. When they say it, you don’t just use it. You try to do your background checks to confirm it before using it [*Social Media Manager, modernghana.com*].
- Some people pass comments and based on the comments they give, you are able to find another dimension to the story and then we use that and write stories out of them.

Sometimes you get it from the screenshot of a tweet of someone and that is how we follow the retweets of our followers who share our stories [Online News Editor, *newsghana24.com*].

#### 7.2.2.2.1.2 Theme 2: Gatekeeping is dependent on a brand-building strategy

Online news media gatekeepers engage in gatekeeping which, according to them, is dependent on the brand-building strategy they have adopted. This was found to be true because their gatekeeping is about paid stories or those that will attract audiences to help increase their finances. This was found to follow the trend of commercial or management branding strategy, and this, they note, influences their brand positively.

This is elaborated further below:

- *Sub-theme 1: Type of gatekeeping influences brand of media outlet positively*

From the literature review in Chapter Three, it was observed that the gatekeeping strategies adopted by media outlets largely define or impact their branding strategies (Siegert, Gerth & Rademacher 2011). Previous sub-themes in this section have delved into some of the gatekeeping strategies adopted by online news media gatekeepers. From their own assessment, the strategies they have adopted have very positive influence on their brand by ensuring that their audiences are informed. The following extracts from the interviews give credence to this observation:

- Our type of gatekeeping influences our brand very positively. This is because the better the brand gets, the more engaging it gets on social media. It is one of our goals to ensure that we are always sending something positive. At the end of the day, there is competition so other news portals are competing for the same audiences we are trying to reach, so the only way we can make sure that they are going to choose our platform is to always make sure that what we send to them adds value. So that is how come we are able to put our brand in a very positive position [Social Media Curator, *mynewsghana.net*].
- It has some type of positivity because it has helped us to be a better news organisation than we used to be. It helps you to know what to do and what not to do, so it has helped us a lot [Social Media Manager, *mynewsghana.net*].

- Our gatekeeping strategy is a great brand builder. The more people realise that the information you publish is authentic or credible, the more they are likely to share. People who visit our web portal are becoming extra careful with what they share so if you position yourself as a credible source of news, people who don't even know that, for instance I am the brain behind the website, they receive the message and even end up sharing it with me again. That is a confirmation that the content I am putting out there is trustworthy and that people are willing to share. Because, without it, people won't share and people won't visit your website but with the kind of traffic we receive, on and off though, it shows that we are doing well so far. We have on numerous occasions received content from US and UK writers just to publish it on our website because of certain content we have published in the past and so they want to associate with our brand and so it is important that we give out the best. We depend on the idea that If it is not good enough, don't put it out there [*Online News Editor, newsghana24.com*].

### **7.2.2.2.2 Branding strategies**

#### *7.2.2.2.2.1 Theme 1: Management or commercial branding emphasised*

Solely online digital news media outlets in Ghana were observed to largely follow the management or commercial branding strategies. Their financing is mostly dependent on adverts (which were not frequent) and retention of audiences online. Most of their stories are published with the finances of the media outlet in mind, though the journalistic content is also considered. The words and framing of content reflect those that will attract and engage audiences to stay longer on the platform which eventually translates into financial inflows. The following sub-themes emphasize this theme.

- *Sub-theme 1: Small/medium scale business entities*

Most online news media gatekeepers in Ghana are small to medium in nature, employing a maximum of five full-time staff. Sometimes, staff retention is very difficult because of the weak capital base. Their offices are often in a single open space, without sophisticated equipment and machinery. The following interview extracts make this evident:

- I have four computers in a workstation like we have in the internet cafes, so that when I employ people or people come in to work with me, they can be well accommodated.

I have my own desk with my laptop and printer. The place has been structured in such a way that it is an open office because it is just a one-shop where the tables, files and everything are located. Within the office, there is a back office where I normally do my publications so that in case, I have people working for me, they will be in the main office while I remain at the back end of the office [*Online News Editor, newsghana24.com*].

- From the office, I am the only one, but I have reporters who are not full time staff but send me news reports. In the past, I had workers. In the past three years that I have been working, I have had not less than 30 workers. I currently have freelance journalists and journalists who work with other media houses who assist me. As we speak now, I have about 10 of them who publish alongside the content I personally post out there. So, they write from wherever they are, like a remote station and then they publish and then it goes out automatically [*Online News Editor, newsghana24.com*].
- *Sub-theme 2: Financing based largely on adverts and retention of audiences online*

The main source of income for online news media gatekeepers are the adverts placed by their clients, as well as their ability keep their audiences online for long periods.

This influences the type of gatekeeping they engage in, where the motivation behind the stories they publish is audience engagement. The following extracts emphasise this assertion:

- We have writers and reporters, editors, social media manager and other staff. So in doing our stories, we should have it such that it will generate some income and we can also pay our workers. There are other statutory fees and utilities we pay on a regular basis and all of these have to be financed by our activities online. So inasmuch as we think of bringing relevant and credible news, we also consider what will bring us revenue [*Social Media Manager, mynewsghana.net*].
- The revenue comes in many aspects. It sometimes comes from the adverts but mostly from the traffic we route or generate on our website and social media portals. The more attractive news stories and headlines we put up to engage our audiences, the more income we also generate to finance our activities [*Social Media Manager, modernghana.com*].
- It is not only about the content of the stories we put up but how to generate finances. When your site is credible, it automatically comes with everything. When you build your brand, it comes with everything. You are able to get people to come on board, when you do the right thing. So that is what *mynewsghana.net* has worked out for over the years [*Social Media Manager, mynewsghana.net*].

- We always consider something that will entice or interest our audiences to like, comment or react to whatever we have put up. It's a fact we consider but that is not the only thing. We also ensure that whatever we have put there is something that is of value to the person going to read it [*Social Media Curator, mynewsghana.net*].
- When we give different titles to the various contents we share on different platforms, it provides variety. It is possible that someone is following you on Twitter and has read that content and seen the link alright with an image. When the person goes to say Facebook, he may see a different inscription for the same story. The person may read it again but if it is the same headline and content, the person may ignore it. But the different inscription may make the person feel like it is new, and they will open it to read. We sometimes do this integrated marketing strategies just to ensure that though we are sharing different information, they all arrive at the same web page so that we generate the needed traffic [*Social Media Curator, mynewsghana.net*].
- In deciding on content for the website, we consider the relevance of the message, the trustworthiness of the message and most importantly, what will route traffic to our website [*Social Media Curator, mynewsghana.net*].
- The first is to attract people to come and read on the website so we connect them. For every good story, you will find a connection or a correlation between the image and the heading [*Social Media Curator, mynewsghana.net*].
- We consider both informing and revenue inflow. At the end of the day, the reader wants information, and we want two things. We want to inform them and still make sure that revenue flows in while informing them. So, if we are to put content on Twitter as you mentioned, we are looking at the accuracy and then how best we can entice the reader to delve into the story that we have put across. Those are the two things. One, we want to maintain the precision, so we have to cross-check the article to be sure that it is 100% accurate before we put it across. And also, how can we make the headline either catchy or more attractive, or anything that is comprehensive for anyone who sees it on Twitter to open the article and read into details on our website [*Online News Editor, modernghana.com*].
- It is 50/50. There are situations that you publish articles because those articles will increase financial inflows, not as in taking funds from people to favour them with publications but on a normal day, if we are to report and it has nothing to do with the money, you will report from head to toe without thinking about how to create a headline that will entice somebody because you know you are just submitting or publishing a report. But in this case, you need to submit your report, thinking of paragraphs that will even extend the content to make the reader stay longer on the website, for much revenue inflow. You have to make sure that the reader stays longer on that article and then you have to put in all the research that you have done. You need to have a very nice headline, you need to get a catchy image that you think when they see the image that comes with the article, they will be pushed to open. Sometimes, you have to go to the extent of looking for different images of the people involved in the article and merging

them, making a graphic designer work on the pictures and all that, so we do those things with the intention of enticing the reader or making the reader stay longer on the site for more revenue inasmuch as we know we are reporting the particular article to them [Online News Editor, *mynewsghana.net*].

- Our types of stories are a combination of purely journalistic and those that will increase our finances. There are stories we do for journalistic purposes. For instance, we were invited to the 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Ghana Institute of Journalism in 2018 or so. We did about three stories on it and those stories were purely for journalistic purposes. But there are content we put out there and we know that as for this content, it is going to draw in traffic which will be converted into financial inflows. And so, it is both sides, however, for me, it is more tailored towards the earning. We don't lose sight of the fact that the journalistic aspect should also be revealed in the content we put out there. So, it is both but the financial aspect will very often over-ride the journalistic aspect. However, even if we are tilted towards the financial aspect, that should not lead to a lower content or just putting anything out there. It should be relevant to the times and needs of the readers. So, for me, it is both, but the financial will always outweigh the journalistic aspect. As a private and small business, the business must survive and grow. If it was a public institution, they will tilt more towards the journalistic aspect but for private media houses or online portals, the focus or emphasis is more on the financial aspect [Online News Editor, *newsghana24.com*].

### 7.2.2.2.3 Signalling strategies

#### 7.2.2.2.3.1 Theme 1: Brand communication is limited

Online news media gatekeepers have limited ways of communicating their brands to their audiences. Communication is largely done through the stories they publish on their websites and on social media. Their finances are a non-incentive in using other means to communicate their brand to their audiences. This makes them exert every effort needed to draw the attention of their audiences to their news stories. The following sub-themes elaborate this theme.

- *Sub-theme 1: Careful selection of news stories published to communicate a positive brand*

It is evident that, the major avenue through which media outlets can communicate their brand to their audiences is through their news stories, programmes and events. For solely online news outlets, the main channel is through their websites and their social

media handles. Because of that, they do not meddle in all stories, but only those that will help communicate their brand and give them the needed engagement. Sometimes, audience comments are also moderated before being published on the website. They are not automatically published because the image of the news organisation is at stake and of utmost importance. It is evidenced in the following interview extracts:

- Sometimes, we see news articles out there. Everybody can do it, but sometimes, we as a news organisation cannot do it because we know that people do not know us for things like that. We cannot do just any story because of the way we have fed our audiences over the years. Sometimes, for adult content, you can see news portals doing it but due to the kind of audiences we have and because of our past experiences, our audiences prefer better than adult content so we cannot do that. So, our audiences have influenced the kind of articles that we do [*Online News Editor, mynewsghana.net*].
- We are what we put out there for our audiences to see. Because of that, stories that have issues like those we have not authenticated are not published. But if we have enough information on it or we have done some research on it and we think it is accurate and can be put out there, we do it. In such instances, we publish a disclaimer to the effect that they know our platform stands for authentic news, and so we cannot authenticate that information/article but we assure them that we will update it to the most accurate version. So, in that case, we are able to communicate to them that this is the most authentic news outlet you've always relied on but a situation like this that can break trust, we will communicate to them that we will be researching more on it and updating to ensure that we still rest on our hallmark [*Online News Editor, mynewsghana.net*].
- When you take the website, to help us pass on a certain identity, every news we publish that is originally from us either we source it as *newsghana24.com* or we publish it in the name of the author. And there are instances where we have made some publications where we have used our personally designed images with our logo attached just to send a certain message out there. And then, there are also instances where we have come out with contents or quotes from myself and my colleagues branded in our logo to communicate a certain message. For instance, in the elections that were held in December 2020, we came up with something like that where we had peace messages with our logo attached to help us connect with our readers. So the message we sent out to our readers indirectly suggested to our readers that if they wanted authentic information about the elections, the website that publishes or supports peaceful elections before, during and after, then the best place to find that information is *newsghana24.com*. Those are some of the things we do to communicate our brand to our audiences [*Online News Editor, newsghana24.com*].
- We are working for the masses so whatever information we get out there, we attach our experiences and give them what they want. As I speak, there are a lot of blogs out there. Everybody is trying to do what will raise income or revenue for them, so we try so hard that whatever we put out there is what the audiences want and what will make our

website and social media the top notch and preferred for news [*Social Media Manager, mynewsghana.net*].

- Even with the comments and contributions of my audiences, I do not do automatic publication but I moderate to ensure that what I allow on the website will not tarnish the image of my brand. So, as and when the message comes in and I find myself online, I moderate. When I have to approve it I do that and for those instances I have to do corrections to grammar and spellings too, I do it and publish. Another reason I don't do automatic or instant post approval of the comments is that there are people who we call spammers. They spam and post their website links as a form of comment so that when it comes to your website, it gives them value. People will see their links and go to their websites...that is free adverts for them on our web portal. Because of this, we don't allow instant approval. Some people also come to post their products as adverts. Very often you will see it on Facebook. Sometimes when people do it and certain content is receiving a lot of comments, they come and post their products as adverts and so at the backend of the website, all these things come there and I disapprove of most of them so that only the ones that will be to the benefit of the news portal are allowed [*Online News Editor, newsghana24.com*].

#### 7.2.1.1.1.1 Theme 2: Understaffing leading to negative signalling costs

Online news media gatekeepers are often constrained financially. Because of this, they are not able to employ the requisite staff for all their activities. This often leads to depending on external sources for news input which may not always be reliable and true. Additionally, because some of these outfits are manned by individuals, they are sometimes not able to meet timelines for posting stories and engaging with audiences. These are expensive negative signalling costs they have to incur, not by any fault of theirs, but by their very nature. The following sub-themes elaborate this finding.

- *Sub-theme 1: Inadequate staffing due to high cost of labour leading to multi-tasking*

The weak financial base of solely online digital news organisations makes it difficult for them to employ the requisite staff for all required positions. During this study, of the nine interviews for online news media gatekeepers, only six were conducted because *modernghana.com* did not have a social media curator, and *newsghana24.com* had only an Online News Editor. This makes it apparent that the lean staff must multi-task



on some duties essential in the news process. The following extracts confirm this position:

- A lot goes into publishing news stories. Sometimes stories are delayed because being one person, there are times I find myself in a press conference or in a programme and at the same time I may need to engage with my audiences or even publish a story. Working around all by myself makes it difficult to work around efficiently as will be expected on me, especially with the demands of social media and online portals [*Online News Editor, newsghana24.com*].
- As I said, I do everything by myself but I expect to have full time workers who will come in and work with me [*Online News Editor, newsghana24.com*].
- It is risky but I find myself in the digital age and I am interested in giving up to date publications to my readers so that they keep visiting my site, so I have to come out with every strategy possible to ensure that I am on the move and so when there is a breaking news, I publish from my phone anywhere I find myself [*Online News Editor, newsghana24.com*].
- *Sub-theme 2: Heavy dependence on external news sources*

As discussed above, online news media gatekeepers lack the needed staff capacity for all tasks they undertake within the news process. This makes them rely heavily on external sources for new stories. They sometimes depend on freelance reporters, audiences, the Ghana News Agency, and other traditional and online news sources for their news updates to publish on their websites. The following extracts demonstrate this finding:

- From the office, I am the only one, but I have reporters who are not full time staff but send me news reports. In the past, I had workers. In the past three years that I have been working, I have had not less than 30 workers. I currently have freelance journalists and journalists who work with other media houses who assist me. As we speak now, I have about 10 of them who publish alongside the content I personally post out there. So, they write from wherever they are, like a remote station and then they publish and then it goes right automatically [*Online News Editor, newsghana24.com*].
- Information come from people, so inasmuch as you do your research, there are times you need to get audiences views on issues. When they say it, you don't just use it. You try to do your background checks to confirm before using it [*Social Media Manager, modernghana.com*].

- *Sub-theme 3: Understaffing sometimes leads to not being able to meet deadlines and losing opportunities to connect with audiences*

Working alone or with minimal staff is a daunting task for online news media gatekeepers, which may make them unprofessional and inefficient. Much as they cannot be blamed due to their staff strength, it impacts negatively on their brand because audiences may not be informed adequately and on time of happenings within the media scape. There are instances where they miss the opportunity to connect with their audiences because they may be in other essential engagements. They sometimes adapt strategies to meet their timelines by working from wherever they may find themselves. The following extracts are suggestive of this:

- A lot goes into publishing news stories. Sometimes stories are delayed because being one person, there are times I find myself in a press conference or in a programme and at the same time I may need to engage with my audiences or even publish a story. Working around all by myself makes it difficult to work around efficiently as will be expected on me, especially with the demands of social media and online portals [*Online News Editor, newsghana24.com*].
- There are times I lose the opportunity to connect with my audiences, especially when there is a breaking news story and I am let's say in traffic or in a business meeting. What I, however, do is that I am almost always on the move and when I am stuck in a place where it will be difficult to get to the office to publish news stories, I do that from my mobile phone. Because of the information I share on social media with my audiences, I am forced to have all my social media handles on my mobile phone because of the difficulty in being in the office at all times. This helps me to share information easily, though it is risky [*Online News Editor, newsghana24.com*].

#### **7.2.2.2.4 News diffusion strategies**

##### *7.2.2.2.4.1 Theme 1: Limited news diffusion options*

Online news media gatekeepers in Ghana have very limited options to engage with their audiences. Inasmuch as they, like their traditional media counterparts, want to engage more with their audiences, their limited finances limit their options. This makes

the website and social media the only available options. Because of that, they consider their audiences an essential part of the survival of their outlets. They, therefore, engage with them frequently, trying to involve their suggestions into the content and responding often to their queries and comments. They do not have physical meetings but have built a strong online relationship with them. The audiences have, thus, been found to be good propagators of the news stories of these outlets. The following sub-themes prove this point with the extracts confirming them:

- *Sub-theme 1: Audience engagement is very relevant in their activities*

Every online or digital business highly depends on audiences or customers to propagate the good news about their business to reach areas that, ordinarily, may be difficult to reach. For online news media gatekeepers, unlike their traditional media counterparts, the only means of branding their outlets is the website and the social media outlets. It also serves as the only source of news dissemination and engagement. Because of this, they consider their outlets very important and their audiences as partners in the business. They, therefore, seize every available opportunity to engage with their audiences. Some of them have dedicated staff to handle such correspondence from audiences. The following extracts make it clear.

- We have a social media management team because we keep posting contents on social media. You don't just post and go. You must answer whatever questions that come with it [*Social Media Curator, mynewsghana.net*].
- As a social media person, you are spending almost your whole day on social media. So, as and when the feedbacks come, you need to react. Because, the earlier you react, the better [*Social Media Curator, mynewsghana.net*].
- Once a while, we put images on Twitter to get our audiences to interact with us. These are different from the normal articles we put there for information. We put these images

and other things that are happening in our society on Twitter just to create interest and engage our readers [*Social Media Manager, mynewsghana.net*].

- If we are posting on Twitter, it is not solely for information purposes like our website. Sometimes we just want to post something engaging so we might just consider the fact that we are always trying to push news to the audiences. We always want to give them what they will like. The major consideration is not to post content that will stain the reputation of the platform, but anything engaging goes [*Online News Editor, newsghana24.com*].
- Sometimes, under normal circumstances, when you post an article on social media and you make it engaging, audiences react and retweet to other networks. For example, the recent situation on the Special Prosecutor and the Presidency. If you put a content out there with question mark, it is an article though, but on twitter, we can put a link and then we will put an image and write may be... Was the Special Prosecutor's resignation, right? That alone, because it comes with a question mark, it attracts reactions and comments and all that so when the platform is dull, we do things like that to engage our audiences [*Online News Editor, mynewsghana.net*].
- *Sub-theme2: Audiences are considered highly inclusive in the news diffusion agenda and systems have been put in place to track their activities*

Online news media gatekeepers acknowledge the fact that their audiences are a great asset in the diffusion of their news stories in the digital space. They cannot, of their own accord, sell their news widely, certainly not as widely as their audiences would. Some of their audiences find themselves in wide networks within and outside their locality, sometimes outside Ghana. As such, posting stories of online news media gatekeepers within such networks goes a long way to improve the news diffusion of such stories. They have also put systems in place to check analytics of news diffusion activities online. Most of these systems, fitted at the back end of their websites, generate statistics of audience traffic and activities on their websites, as well as plug-in social media handles. They also receive alerts of tweets and retweets about their news stories, revealing the propagation of their news stories within other network clusters on Twitter. This is revealed in the following responses:

- The only way we are able to check is that, each time audiences share our stories or links, you can see the number of people who have retweeted that message. We often

make a follow-up to the retweets and when we do that, we are able to see the comments that people have passed and the number of people who have shared the post. The beautiful thing is that the follow-up stories are produced after people have done these retweets because retweets also lead to comments. Some people pass comments and based on the comments they give, you are able to find another dimension to the story and then we use that and write stories out of them. Sometimes you get it from the screenshot of a tweet of someone and that is how we follow the retweets of our followers who share our stories. Apart from that, we do not have any mechanism in place to check. Sometimes too, when they are retweeting, they send direct comments so that this or that person has retweeted or sent your story to another person or platform [*Online News Editor, newsghana24.com*].

- There are people who retweet anything at all they see, I can say they are in love with the kind of content we put out there. And personally, I place them in the category or class of target audience we are looking for. So, these people always leave comments or try to engage with you, as well as propagate your messages or news. There are others who are also not always online, and others come around once a while to engage with what we have done and leave comments etc. Often, we have people retweeting our stories to others who are not following us, so it gets to reach other platforms and new people who are not following us [*Social Media Manager, modernghana.com*].
- When we see our audiences propagating our stories on Twitter, it makes us feel good because we know the story is good. On average, we have about 20% of our stories being retweeted or sent to other platforms by our audiences on an average day. Let's say if about 100 people have access to our story, about 20 of them retweet to other platforms [*Online News Editor, newsghana24.com*].
- We get engagement reports as in tweets, retweets and all that. We also get notifications on social media. We get notifications anytime someone tweets or retweets anything that I have posted on the social media platform [*Social Media Curator, mynewsghana.net*].
- I think we are growing. As I was talking to you, I just went to our Twitter platform. There is a story and I just went to check the statistics on the number of retweets; the number of comments; the number of followers within a period of time; the number of people who visited our page on Twitter. The chat keeps going up so the performance indicate that we are growing [*Social Media Curator, mynewsghana.com*].

### 7.3 Summary

The chapter presented the processes involved in data analysis, as well as the findings of the study. It first discussed, the graphical and network visualisation of Twitter audiences' activities; and second, the semi-structured interviews. Data was first analysed for the individual data sources. For the auxiliary quantitative aspect of the

study, 24 network visualisation graphs with attendant network matrices were generated. Four network visualisation graphs were generated for each of the six news organisations. Graphs were generated at intervals of seven days, as pre-determined by the Twitter network. This helped to cover all audiences' activities for the one-month period without eliminations or duplications. The findings indicated that the radio online digital brand extensions had huge network activities, indicating high brand acceptance by audiences, relative to the solely online news organisations.

Semi-structured interviews analysis involved analysis of interviews data transcripts of Social Media Managers, Social Media Curators and Online News Editors of the six purposively sampled news organisations. In all, fifteen, instead of eighteen, interviews were conducted, producing fifteen transcripts. This happened because some solely online news organisations did not have all required staff at post. Generally, the interviews centred on how media organisations used gatekeeping for branding purposes, how this is signalled to media audiences, and, in the process, helps to diffuse their news stories. Analysis of interview data was based on the conceptual framework generated in Chapter Five. Thus, the themes and sub-themes were categorised under gatekeeping strategies, branding strategies, signalling strategies and news diffusion strategies. This was done distinctively for traditional media gatekeepers and the online news media gatekeepers, based on the similarities of their characteristics.

The study established that though traditional media gatekeepers in Ghana had a number of media processes similar to online news media gatekeepers, certain distinct activities also set them apart. Traditional media gatekeepers often relied on the brand

credibility of the parent company built over years, to brand their online digital brand extensions. Traditional media gatekeepers keep a converged newsroom for the traditional media outlets and the online digital brand extension. As such, they always depended on the newsroom for content for all their news outlets. Additionally, social media accounts are kept and maintained for each traditional media outlet as well as the website to create a vast array of news and information dissemination channels for their audiences. This serves to increase their outlets, diffuse their news widely, as well as reach all segments of audiences. The size of traditional media organisations with online brand extensions serves as an advantage for survival because their income flows in from different sources and the traffic they route to their website sets to give them leverage to receive digital advertisements for their websites. Therefore, traditional media outlets do not engage often in paid stories, but social, advocacy and content meant to inform their audiences. Their branding strategy was found to be largely of journalistic orientation since they emphasised editorial functions.

On the other hand, it was observed that solely online news media organisations were smaller in size, sometimes with a human resource capacity between one and five. They were found to be less financially resourced and so their survival often depended on the finances they generate by engaging and keeping their audiences online. This dictated the kind of stories they engaged in, which are often crafted with catchy headlines, attractive framings and suggestive images that explicitly or implicitly attract audience attention and ensure audiences stay longer online. They mainly had a commercial or management branding strategy to ensure their survival.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

Chapter Seven of this thesis presented the findings gathered from Twitter as well as the semi-structured interviews. Twitter data was gathered by plotting network visualisation graphs using the NodeXL software. Semi-structured interview data was solicited using the Zoom conferencing app due to Covid-19 restrictions and the University of South Africa's ethics certification requirements. The utilisation of these procedures was aimed at exploring how media outlets use their gatekeeping practices to build brand identities for themselves, and how the brand built helps to diffuse their news stories. These were done through the frameworks of gatekeeping and signalling, which were reflective in the conceptual framework developed in Chapter Five. They also served as the framework for data collection and analysis. This study did not aim at generalising the findings, but rather, remained subjective, as emphasised in Chapter Six, to divulge the individual experiences of media outlets by looking at traditional media outlets/gatekeepers separately from online news media gatekeepers/outlets. This informed the adoption of interpretivism, which is based on the relativism ontology and subjectivism epistemology (Dieronitou 2014:7). From the subjectivist position, truth in the context of experiences manifests in multiple realities based on social context (Bagele & Kawulich, 2012:10). This implies that generalising the research findings could have led to invalidity issues because of the differences in characteristics of the sampled news media brands.

This chapter discusses the findings from the perspective of the theoretical frameworks (gatekeeping and signalling theories) which helped to build the conceptual framework



in Chapter Five, vis-a-vis the literature. The discussions highlight the literature and conceptual frameworks (gatekeeping, branding, signalling and news diffusion). The chapter subsequently summarises the study's position under each of the research questions posed in Chapter One. The study, following a qualitatively driven mixed-methods approach, addresses most of the questions using semi-structured interview data, with the data from the network visualisation graphs serving an auxiliary role. Finally, based on the discussions, the chapter provides an overarching theme as a summary to conclude the findings of the study. It further recommends avenues in the form of conceptual frameworks to consolidate gatekeeping activities on digital platforms.

## **8.2 Media branding through gatekeeping in the digital era**

The central argument in this study has been how media organisations use their gatekeeping activities to brand themselves. This is done by creating competitive content, and distinguishing features and characteristics that make them unique among competing brands. This is more pronounced in the digital era, where media channels and content creators abound. From the interviews, it was clear that all six news organizations studied understood the phenomenon of branding as a means of catching the eyes and ears of audiences. However, associating gatekeeping with media branding came as a surprise to some interviewees. Further explanations and clarifications were eye-openers, which brought enlightenment and understanding of how their routine activities went a long way to inform society of what they stood for. They also explained why they had certain responses from their audiences and society at large on certain publications in the past.

While traditional media has its place in media branding, especially in Africa and Ghana in particular, digital brand extensions have been identified as very critical points of differentiation and branding by media organisations. This has led to the hybrid system practiced by most traditional media outlets in Ghana. Thus, though the traditional structures and processes of gatekeeping in media practice have not seen much change, the diversity has been created within the digital media. It has become the point of call for news and information, especially among millennials, thus prompting the employment of more digitally-oriented staff and the provision of training for existing employees. Digital media outlets use multi-media modelled websites and an array of social media platforms to share content over a wide range of virtual communities and to stimulate potential audiences. While media outlets go all out to enrich their content with up-to-date, relevant and real-time information, they also employ search engine optimisation tools to increase the visibility of their news stories online. This ensures on-the-spot signalling to attract the audiences' attention, facilitate rate of exposure, and, for preference in audience reading. All these activities are aimed at achieving return on investment.

Branding serves as an opportunity for media organisations to build a dependable and credible image and to raise brand awareness with audiences by promoting the quality of what they do (Wizdo, O'Neill, Camuso & Birrell 2016) and stand for through signalling. This explains the emergence of phenomena like 'brand journalism' (Bull 2013), which calls for a re-examination of the gatekeeping concept despite its longstanding application in the media space. The quality of news, in terms of relevance, credibility, accuracy and good timing, largely comes to play in the digital environment, much more than the quantity. This explains why media audiences would

preferably visit the news website of their known traditional media brands that have been tried and tested on news coverage and reporting, despite the abundance of digital news outlets and numerous content producers. This further explains why traditional media outlets have larger followings on digital platforms.

With the emergence of virtual communities online which share information among themselves, there is also a need to understand and manage online communities (McWilliam 2012) to help in projections, and to understand how audiences diffuse news information online. While managing such online communities has its own attendant challenges which require special skills and training, it is one area which, when managed well, can help news organisations organise their audiences. It also allows them to help know the stories of interest as a way of gatekeeping and meeting those news needs by following up on such stories. The NodeXL software applied in this study is one software with an easy-to-learn interface of application, but is also very effective in identifying the interests of audiences based on the discussion groups they contribute to, and to be able to attend to their information needs.

As discussed in Chapter Five, though conventional gatekeeping models may not be wholly operational in the digital media era, they retain some usefulness. That is, digital news media outlets cannot perform effectively without the foundation laid by traditional gatekeeping modes of practice, especially that of the Hierarchy of Influences Model (Shoemaker 1991; Shoemaker & Reese 1996, 2014) which outlines five essential influencers of media content. This theory re-visited Lewin's (1943) original gatekeeping model to rope in public/citizen/online users into its modeling. In so doing, it portrays the multivariate and multi-level factors influencing news content and

information. This has been the basis for all digital gatekeeping theories, such as those developed by Wallace (2018). Media expression, which essentially informs, educates and entertains audiences, embodies the objectives, mission and brand of the media outlet, reflecting how the media outlet will be viewed by society. This is known as the brand identity, which is built as a result of daily gatekeeping routines, decisions and choices made by media outlets. In the digital era, influencers of media content are numerous, spanning beyond that which was envisaged by Shoemaker and Reese (1991; 1996; 2014) to include ordinary citizens/netizen internet users and even algorithmic devices.

### **8.3 Summary of the findings: addressing the research questions**

Media organisations cannot be largely differentiated from any other business organisation due to the competitive environment they find themselves, especially in the digital era. While effort will be channeled into points of differentiation such as logos, brand names and slogans to stay afloat, a major and unassertive form of branding and differentiation, which this thesis has projected, is gatekeeping. Though initially considered a routine activity, gatekeeping has now been uncovered as a distinctive media brand personality feature and characteristic. Which, unlike previous human brand personality features, is theoretically driven and empirically supported (Davies et al 2018). Through their gatekeeping, media organisations outwardly express their vision and what they stand for as a result of the critical and detailed choices around language and presentation style of anchors, brand attributes, brand promise, editorial decisions made on journalistic content, and management decisions on marketing content.

As postulated by the reviewed literature in Chapters Two to Four, between the two sets of gatekeepers studied, traditional media gatekeepers were found to be advantaged in branding their news organisations for acceptance by audiences over their online news media counterparts who emerged with the digital era. The findings in Chapter Seven have corroborated this position. The reasons are not far-fetched because the experiences garnered by radio during its years of existence and the changing phases of media evolution come into play in that. This is because radio survived and adapted at the inception of both television (Selas & Bonini 2014:71) and other media forms. In Africa, and Ghana in particular, a number of factors including accessibility and affordability have ensured that radio continues to survive in the face of the internet and technological advancement in general.

Against this backdrop, the following sub-sections summarise how the outcomes of the literature review, theoretical discussions and findings of the study address the research questions posed in Chapter One.

***8.3.1 To what extent are conventional and digital gatekeeping models suitable for the assessment of the gatekeeping functions and roles of radio, to distinguish it from other content producers and gatekeepers, and to build brand personality?***

Theorisation and research in media gatekeeping started with White's (1950) seminal study, which was an adaptation of Lewin's (1943) field theory. After White (1950), gatekeeping research evolved into more complex theories, with the digital era posing the most sophisticated largely because of the different levels of content creators and gatekeepers available. Each gatekeeping theory was propounded as a result of the gatekeeping situation, knowledge and understanding at the time. As such, previous

gatekeeping models were regarded as insufficient for the gatekeeping function at subsequent periods in time. Until the digital era, traditional media was the main source of news to people and, as such, most of the gatekeeping theories were limited to them until Shoemaker and Reese (1991; 1996; 2014) identified other influencers which impacted media content. This led to the development of the Hierarchy of Influences Model. In the digital era, however, additional content producers like aggregators, algorithmic devices and ordinary citizens/netizen internet users have been involved in gatekeeping. The evolution in gatekeeping modeling, as identified in Chapters Two and Five, was necessitated by a need to account for these content producers, technological developments, news-gathering routines, economic constraints and technologies (Bennett & Kaid 2004).

White's (1950) theory, which conceptualised the news editor or the individual gatekeeper in the traditional media setting as the most important factor, with significant authority in deciding what should be news and set the public agenda, was later found to be inadequate to assess the whole gatekeeping process. Thus, calling for a widening of the dimensions (Dimitrova et al 2003; Hollifield, Kosicki & Becker 2001; Peterson 1981; Plaisance & Skewes 2003; Singer 1997; Snider 1967; Wanta & Craft 2004) to include individuals, organisations and institutions that determined the volume and type of information consumed by audiences. With the Hierarchy of Influences Model, Shoemaker (1991) and later Shoemaker and Reese (1996; 2014) presented a useful multi-level hierarchical influences assessing model for media gatekeeping. The five levels of media content influencers were identified as the individual, media routines, organisational, social institutions and social systems level. These conventional models emphasised the important place of traditional media like radio.

Though other influencers had been accounted for, the significant role of traditional media was prominent because the news process then was unidirectional with traditional media like radio still setting the news agenda.

In the digital era, not only has technology shifted media focus to digital media, with traditional media losing its position as the sole information source which sets the media agenda, but it has also necessitated the development of digital gatekeeping theories. The digital era brought with it new gatekeepers, who operate separate gates from that of traditional media gatekeepers, but who had not been factored into conventional gatekeeping theories. Conventional models have been critiqued as lacking the necessary robustness to recognise new digital technologies (Cossiavelou et al 2011:51) and tackle the challenges of the digital era. This translated into gatekeeping theorisation being conceptualised as being in a state of transition (Shoemaker & Vos 2009; Vos & Heinderyckx 2015), and the challenging of gatekeeping theory's continued relevance (Heinderyckx & Vos 2016; Pearson & Kosicki 2017). Digital media have prompted digital and networked gatekeeping theories to address the identified gatekeeping gaps (Robinson 2006; Singer 1998; Williams & Carpini 2004).

However, the call for digital gatekeeping theories and models, and the attendant responses have not been done outside of conventional or pre-existing theories, especially the filters described in the Shoemaker/Reese model (Cossiavelou et al 2011:51). Though conventional gatekeeping models may not be wholly adequate in the digital media era, they retain some usefulness. In addition, digital media technologies cannot exist on their own without conventional gatekeeping

theories/models. It is, therefore, not surprising to see traditional media like radio prominently represented on digital media making important strides by championing their known traditional practices and routines in the digital space.

The sampling criteria and justification provided in Chapter Six on the participation of various radio stations included in this study is reflective of the above. It was emphasised that each of the stations came into existence at various stages of the development of radio in Ghana but have achieved great feats in the digital era. *Joy FM*, which is the oldest, emerged in 1995 (National Communications Authority 2017), just when political pluralisation and neo-economic policies across sub-Saharan Africa had fostered the pluralisation of the media airwaves in Ghana (Blankson 2005; Heath 2001). *Peace FM* started operations in 1998 (National Communications Authority 2017) as one of the first media organisations to operate solely in the *Akan* local language, while *Citi FM*, which is the most recent, started operations in 2002 (National Communications Authority 2017). Their years of existence and experience are evident in the activities of their online digital brand extensions in the competitive digital media space. The semi-structured interviews revealed how the brand name and credibility of traditional media brands built over the years had helped to sell the online digital brands of these organisations. Thus, confirming the postulation in the literature review in Chapter Three. These were also substantiated in the network visualisation graphs, which showed massive audience followings and audience activities in the Twitter network handles of the radio online digital brand extensions. Comparing the network visualisation graphs of these radio online digital brand extensions (Figures 7.1 to 7.12) to those of the solely online digital brands which emerged with the digital era (Figures 7.13 to 7.24) in Chapter Seven, it is apparent that the brands built by traditional media



outlets in Ghana through their gatekeeping and choices resulted in relevant and credible news. This has translated into comparatively huge followings in the digital space. This is evident in the large audience involvement in discussions on various topics and stories which has created discussion groups on Twitter. *Citifmonline.com* was observed to have 1421, 1596, 1532 and 1509 individual audience members (number of vertexes on Table 7.2) on their Twitter discussion platforms within each of the four weeks of network visualisation, respectively. These individuals were involved in 3808, 5758, 5896 and 7073 activities (total edges on Table 7.2) on 34, 16, 20 and 14 discussion groups, respectively, within the four-week period. As evidenced in the figures, the activities were progressively increasing every week.

*Myjoyonline.com* recorded 1259, 1386, 1299 and 1607 individuals (number of vertexes on Table 7.3) visiting their Twitter handle within the four-week study period. These individuals were involved in 3280, 3446, 6470 and 6159 activities (total edges on Table 7.3) on 41, 21, 20 and 21 discussion forums, respectively, within the study period. In the case of *peacefmonline.com*, there were 936, 1319, 1473 and 1455 individuals (number of vertexes on Table 7.4) within the four weeks, undertaking 2890, 5341, 6284 and 4886 activities (total edges on Table 7.4) on 17, 18, 11, 31 discussion forums, respectively.

In the case of the solely online news media outlets, it is evident from Tables 7.5 to 7.8 and the network visualisations graphs (Figures 7.13 to 7.24) that audience activities were comparatively very low. *Mynewsghana.com*, for instance, had 357, 163, 31 and 32 individual audience members (number of vertexes on Table 7.5) involved in 6141,

2191, 42 and 47 activities (total edges on Table 7.5) on 12, 10, 4 and 4 discussion forums, respectively. *Newsghana24* had 4, 2, 2 and 12 individuals (number of vertexes on Table 7.6) involved in 4, 2, 2 and 12 activities (total edges on Table 7.6) on 1, 1, 1 and 1 discussion forums. *Modernghana* had 97, 159, 203 and 192 individual audience members (number of vertexes on Table 7.7) involved in 219, 360, 458 and 370 activities (total edges on Table 7.7) on 6, 8, 8 and 11 discussion forums, respectively.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the numerous content producers and solely online digital platforms notwithstanding, traditional media outlets' content on digital media is highly accepted and patronised by audiences. The semi-structured interviews have proven that this content has been taken through traditional editorial review processes and formatting, justifying the quest of this thesis in Chapter One to know if "the professional gatekeeping function of traditional news media contain an undisclosed benefit which inspires the need to build a brand personality?" These findings affirm and substantiate the fact that normative gatekeeping is still essential for branding in the digital era.

### ***8.3.2 To what extent do the gatekeeping activities performed by radio online digital brand extensions compare with that of solely online digital brands without traditional media affiliation, and how effective are these activities in routing audience traffic to online news websites?***

The study performed a comparative analysis by understudying three solely online digital news brands and three radio online digital brand extensions in an attempt to unearth how each category of media genre performed gatekeeping for branding on online digital media platforms. Radio digital brand extensions were found to be

products of already established traditional media firms with radio, television and even non-media business affiliates. The traditional media affiliation was found to be the pillar behind the popularity and credibility enjoyed by the radio online digital brand extensions. These were found to be quite different in the case of solely online digital news media brands which had to strive for recognition amidst the numerous new sources in the digital space. Gatekeeping processes and activities on digital platforms by traditional media gatekeepers in this study could not be absolutely differentiated from that of the online news media gatekeepers. However, some of the activities undertaken are restricted only to traditional media gatekeepers due to the converged newsrooms that they operate.

For the radio online brand extensions, the new media add-on largely serves as a medium of amplification and hype for the associated traditional media outlet. Hence, all information put on digital platforms is produced from the newsroom. Due to the rate of information turnaround on digital platforms compared to traditional media, traditional media organisations have devised a means to provide timely news to their audiences as and when it is available, which is a practice on digital platforms. The operators of *myjoyonline.com* and the associated social media handles have adopted a digital first policy which means that all information or news is first published online before it is broadcast on traditional media. This is necessary to inform audiences as and when news breaks, rather than waiting for the news hour on radio or television.

Radio online digital brands were found to undertake very rigid gatekeeping activities based on their traditional media routines and, because of this, the newsroom that

served the traditional media also serves the new media. This was found to confirm the assertion by Usher (2014:228) that “many of the routines and practices of news production observed in the golden era of news ethnography remain constant”, even in the digital era. Almost all content found on digital platforms of traditional media outlets were products of the newsroom. No news story went out without editorial approval. For *myjoyonline.com*, there is strict adherence to post only content from the newsroom on the website but the pliability of social media allows for some innovation in posting the same newsroom content. At *peacefmonline.com* and *citifmonline.com*, aside from strict posting of newsroom information on the website and on social media, a relative amount of flexibility is also allowed on social media. At solely online news outlets, such as *modernghana.com*, *mynewsghana.net* and *newsghana24.com*, there is comparatively much more flexibility in posting content on the website and on social media. Hard news like political content often requires permission from management or editorial review before being published on social media or on the website, However, entertainment and other soft news can be published without permission or going through editorial approval, so far as it does not dent the reputation of the news organisation.

The news stories of traditional media were found to be journalistic in nature, covering mostly general, social and advocacy stories that were found to be of relevance to the audiences they served. The semi-structured interviews revealed that the content strategies of radio online digital brands on digital platforms were considered essential brand building strategies. As such, content was chosen carefully and goes through editorial review to add value to the news organisation’s already known identity, thus, the ‘*I brand, you brand, we brand*’ strategy. This finding affirms the assertion that the

boundary position engaged in by traditional media restrains them from deviating from traditional journalistic norms and practices, even in an environment of fewer restrictions like social media (Groshek & Tandoc 2017).

This was found to be contrary to what pertained with solely online digital brands, where the stories published were often commercially inclined paid stories or those that will engage audiences for longer periods on the website to help boost the finances of the news organisation. Such self-regarding trustee attitudes (Coleman 1990; Przepirorka & Berger 2017), as hypothesised in Chapter Five, often builds a selfish ambition where news organisations are moved by their expected gain over the benefit of their programming to their audiences. In effect, the news content and signals sent out by media organisations are essentially commercial and public relations stories which are in the financial interest of the media organisation. They have no incentive to meet the truster's advances or expectations. Such stories are often of little or no relevance to media audiences. Ultimately, a market orientation will be projected by the media organisation, putting the profits and advantages to be achieved before the information needs of audiences. Przepirorka and Berger's (2017:375) summary of Coleman's (1990) explanation of the relationship between a self-regarding trustee and its truster, as outlined in Chapter Five, leads to a situation where the trustee's inability to meet the truster's needs leads to a situation where "the truster regrets having made an advance if it remains unmet by the trustee" (Przepirorka & Berger 2017:375). As such, further engagements or advances are unlikely. Fundamental to the principles of signalling theory is the fact that the signaller or trustee first chooses whether and how to communicate information (signal) and the receiver or truster chooses how to interpret the signal (Connelly et al 2011). If the receiver reads irrelevance into news

content received, obviously, there will no further engagement. This thesis advances that, this is the current state of solely online news media organisations in Ghana, where the low population density of the network visualisations graphs in Figures 7.13 to 7.24 provide pictorial representation.

Audience engagement in real time on social media was found to be a key feature of live radio programmes by radio online brand extensions. This is because each radio or television station of the traditional media outlets sampled had their unique host of social media outlets. Each programme aired was also streamed live on social media and audiences had the opportunity to select themes and songs for programmes, join forum discussions and even meet personally with staff of the media outlet to interact. Thus, making it lively with a variety in programming. This made audiences feel part of the news organisation, helping to build brand loyalty. Solely online news outlets were found not to have this feature and depended on audience engagement on their website and social media handles, thus, presenting a reduced degree of audience engagement.

For radio online brand extensions, audience loyalty was found to be non-negotiable because their credibility had been tried and tested over the years of their existence and they use every means possible to engage their audiences. They, therefore, have large audience followings in the new media space and the effort of incorporating the new media experience into their traditional media programming is paying off with large numbers of followers. This was evident in the network visualisation graphs of the radio online digital brands that showed huge audience presence and activities throughout

the study period. This did not fall short of affirming Groshek and Tandoc's (2017: 209) notion that traditional news media organisations and their professional gatekeepers, in most contexts, enjoy larger followings on Twitter and other social media platforms than blogs and online digital news media gatekeepers. Audiences were busy tweeting, retweeting, mentioning and sharing the news stories of the news outlets to other people within other networks, creating various discussion groups for news stories, links, videos or images posted on Twitter.

Aside from engagement on their digital platforms, radio online digital brands often teamed up with their traditional media wing to organise out-of-studio activities to engage their audiences and to build brand loyalty. Therefore, contributing to the number of followings enjoyed by traditional media gatekeepers on digital platforms. These were not only programmes to meet radio presenters or fun activities, but included free business advisory services, advocacy programmes, health screenings, entertainment shows and health walks. Such programmes make audiences feel that their well-being is also of importance to the media outlets, and they felt attached to them. The finances and staff strength of solely online news outlets is a disincentive for organising such programmes. Online news media gatekeepers were found to be small and medium scale businesses which mostly operate in a one- or two-roomed office with less than five staff. Their financial inflows are often limited, being sourced from advertisements and the retention of audiences online. They often have only the digital platform to engage with their audiences, and cannot afford the luxury of arranging outreach activities or events.

The radio online digital brands sampled were also observed to have departments with requisite staff employed to various positions, making accountability a key aspect of every assigned responsibility. With the new media addition, people with key new media skills had been employed in some instances, while some staff members who started in radio had also been trained into the new media department, similar to the findings of Sellas and Bonini (2014:76). This was found to be different from what pertained with online news media gatekeepers sampled in this study. Two of them did not have staff in some required positions. Also, as was obvious in the interviews, because they did not have reporters and correspondents like the traditional media gatekeepers, they often depended on freelance journalists and ordinary public/citizens/online users as “genuine co-workers” (Heinonen 2011:49) to provide them with information and additional angles to stories (Groshek & Tandoc 2017). This not only left them with the task of confirming the stories, but some freelance reporters were also unreliable sources of news stories.

***8.3.3 To what extent does the presence of Ghanaian radio online digital brand extension gatekeepers on Twitter influence their news diffusion within the personal networks of their audiences compared with those of Ghanaian online digital news media gatekeepers without traditional media affiliation?***

Contrary to findings elsewhere which suggest that the activities of traditional media on social media platforms like Twitter were conventional rather than dialogic (Groshek & Tandoc 2017:209), traditional media gatekeepers in Ghana were found to be more active and dialogic on their radio online digital brands than their online news media gatekeeper counterparts. The strategy adopted to ensure wider diffusion of their news stories is that each traditional media outlet, like radio or television, and the website have their unique and full complement of social media handles. If the media



organisation uses social media handles like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, etc., as channels, each traditional media and the website have their individual platform accounts and handles. Thus, increasing the number of channels for audience engagements. Additionally, aside from live shows, all stories, headlines, videos and images posted on these social media handles have links that route audience traffic to the website, funneling substantial traffic to the website to meet the expectation of advertisers, both foreign and local.

From the Twitter network visualisation graphs plotted with NodeXL, it was observed that the activities and connections (total number of edges) between audiences (vertexes) of radio online digital brands on Twitter were denser than those of the solely online news media gatekeepers. Degree centrality, which is “the simple count of total number of connections linked to a vertex” (Hansen et al 2011:40) helps to assess how connected entities are, and it has different dimensions to it. Betweenness centrality, which is “a measure of how often a given vertex lies on the shortest path between two other vertices” or “a measure of how much removing a person would disrupt the connections between other people in the network” (Hansen et al 2011:40) helps to visualise the importance of certain individuals in disseminating news information within the network. Sometimes taking some individuals out can disrupt a whole network because they serve as important “bridges” between the news organisation and other huge networks. This showed as much as 2475233.821 and as low as 849888.427, with maximum and minimum averages of 2145.555 and 1322.727, respectively, for the radio online brand extensions. This implies that on average, a minimum of 1323 individuals served as important linkages in disseminating or diffusing the news stories of the radio online news brands. For the solely online news brands, the maximum and

minimum betweenness centrality were 17900.185 and 0.000, with average maximum and minimum values of 409.255 and 0.000, respectively. This implies that as many as 409 persons served as important bridges; while in some instances, the graph densities were so low, showing no tweets, retweets, or mentions.

Closeness centrality considers the “average distance between a vertex and every other vertex in the network” (Hansen et al 2011:41). This shows the extent of influence that any vertex has within a network. A vertex can have very low closeness centrality if it can only influence other vertexes close by or within a hop away from them. On the other hand, if the vertex can influence peripheral vertexes, then it has a very high closeness centrality value. On their Twitter handles, *Citifmonline.com*, *myjoyonline.com* and *peacefmonline.com* had a maximum of 0.001 and a minimum of 0.000 throughout the entire study period. This shows that the extent of news diffusion of the tweets, retweets and mentions were beyond their influence. The audiences were disseminating the news stories, links, videos and images beyond the influence of the news organisations, meaning that largely, news diffusion on the Twitter handles of the radio online digital brands were widely done by audiences and not the news organisations themselves. For the solely online news media outlets, *Newsghana24.com* recorded 0.333, 1.000, 1.000 and 1.091, respectively, as maximum closeness centrality values for the entire study period. The minimum values were 0.200, 1.000, 1.000 and 0.048, respectively. *Modernghana.com* recorded maximum closeness centrality values of 0.008, 0.004, 0.003 and 0.003 and minimum values of 0.003, 0.002, 0.001, 0.001, respectively. *Mynewsghana.net* recorded maximum values of 0.002, 0.005, 0.032 and 0.031 and minimum values of 0.001, 0.003, 0.017 and 0.016, respectively. Because the networks were not as densely

populated as those of the radio online digital brands, the influence of the news organisation was felt in the dissemination and diffusion of the news stories, translating into the high figures recorded by the solely online digital news brands. Though the audiences were diffusing the news stories, the online news media gatekeepers were observed to be exerting great effort to ensure that the news stories, videos, images, and links were widely disseminated.

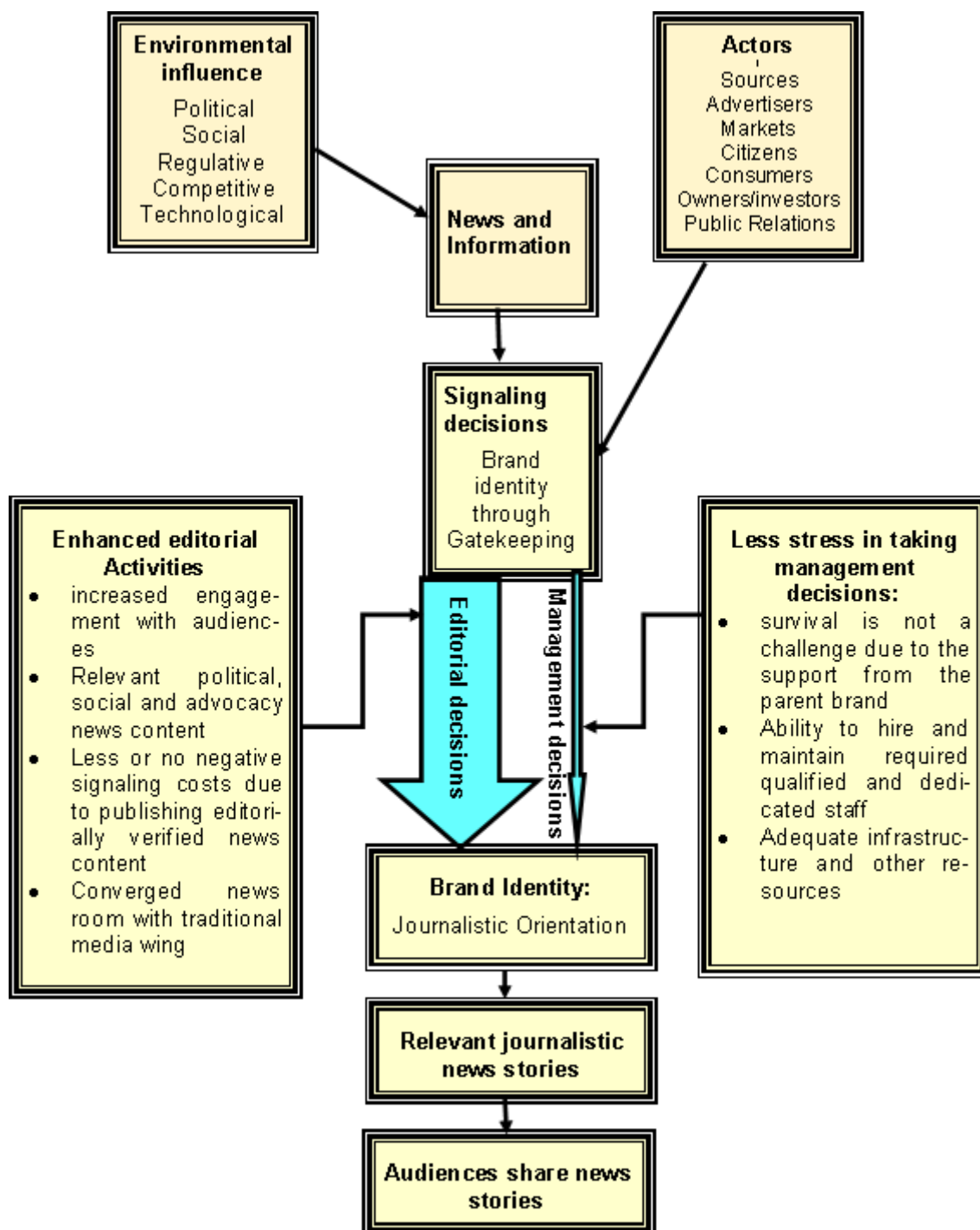
The geodesic distance is “the measure of the shortest path between two vertexes or people” (Hansen et al 2011:40). For radio online digital brands, it was found to have a maximum of four throughout, with varying averages of a minimum of 2.19298. This indicates that each person who was connected to these radio online digital brands tweeted, retweeted, or mentioned the news item to at least two networks. On the other hand, solely online digital brands had maximums ranging from 1 to 4, with varying averages of a minimum of 0.05. This implies that most people in the Twitter network of solely online digital brands did not tweet, retweet, or mention stories, links or share images or videos which were posted by the news organisation to any network. While radio online digital brand audiences shared news stories, images, videos, and links to at least two and at most four other networks, those of the solely online brands had between one and four maximum shares to other networks, depending on the density of the graph. With a minimum of 0.05 networks, meaning the average sharing rate was woefully low. This translates into many connecting to Twitter but not retweeting stories to any other network. This is an indicator of how audiences trust the information published by radio online digital news media brands in comparison to the content published by solely online news media brands. Therefore, they have confidence in sending the news stories of radio online digital media brands to others.

The news diffusion trend of audiences on the Twitter handles of radio online digital news media brands, as the interviews affirmed, were achieved partly from their traditional brand name and also the efforts channeled into maintaining the standards and credibility attained over the years. Solely online news media outlets need to come together, consolidate their efforts to become a strong force in branding if they are to be forerunners in branding their organisations and also remain competitive. This confirms the literature position that functional attributes alone, such as news content, may not be enough to attract media audiences (Aris & Bughin 2005; Kim, Baek & Martin 2010:117). Media branding, with its attendant corollary effects and 'soft' concepts of brand personality through differentiation, brand attributes and reputation (Aaker 1990; Aris & Bughin 2005; Biel 2003:4), coupled with audience involvement, has been the antidote to competition and the negative effect of the digital era for the radio online digital brands. This further affirms the fact that radio online digital brands have taken after their original traditional media parental attributes of "audience-oriented commercial logic and normatively oriented public logic" (Landerer 2013:245), and combined it with interconnectedness that the digital era presents to ensure their renewed relevance and survival.

#### ***8.3.4 What conceptual framework can guide Ghanaian radio digital brand extensions in consolidating their gatekeeping and brand personality building initiatives for greater news diffusion by their audiences?***

The guiding principle for radio online digital brand extensions on the digital platforms has not been different from the parent traditional media brand. It has been found to be mainly editorial decisions that have resulted in following largely journalistic orientations

rather than management decisions that consider the survival of the organisations, hence, following a marketing orientation. The journalistic orientations are followed due to their association with established traditional media which guarantees them financial security and sustainability. Figure 8.1 has been developed as a conceptual framework based on the findings from the semi-structured interviews presented in Chapter Seven. It also helps to consolidate the gatekeeping activities of radio online digital brands.



**Figure 8.1 Conceptual framework to consolidate the gatekeeping activities of radio online news organisations in Ghana (Author construct, July 2021)**

From Figure 8.1 above, it is observed that the news information received is influenced by the environmental forces which include the political, social, regulative, competitive and technological space within which the media organisations operate. These are

influencing factors that the news organisation has little or no control over, as in the social systems level in the hierarchy of influences model (Shoemaker 1991; Shoemaker & Reese 1996, 2014). In the news process, aside from these influences, there are other actors and influencers who also impact on the news content and the signal that the news organisation sends out to audiences and society at large. These include sources, advertisers, markets and citizens. At the point of sending signals or news information out, news organisations make decisions on which information to send out, and, subsequently, the orientation to follow. Taking cognizance of the size of the arrows at the decision-making point by news organisations (highlighted in blue) on Figure 8.1, it is observable that the editorial decisions for radio online digital brands is larger than that of management decisions resulting in a journalistic brand identity orientation. This is as a result of the advantaged position that radio online digital brand extensions occupy. This gives them less responsibility to brood on issues of survival, so they are at liberty to engage in general news stories which are of relevance to media audiences including political, social and advocacy stories.

In Chapter Two, the literature review emphasised and enumerated the brand power of radio online brand extensions over their solely online media counterparts. This has been corroborated by the findings of this study. This has been brought to bare through the semi-structured interviews and also substantiating how the brand power influences news diffusion in the NodeXL graphical network visualisations graphs. Being associated with traditional media brands guarantees security right from inception and the brand image of the traditional parent brand is automatically conferred on the brand extension (Bhat & Reddy 2001; Casper 2002; Hättöy 1989; Park, Milberg & Lawson 1991; Völckner 2003). Radio online digital brands have greater financial security by

virtue of the integrated financing undertaken for all channels within the group. This has substantial implications in the kind of news they engage in which is general, social and advocacy stories. Also, because the traditional media outlets use the online brand extension to hype their traditional media contents, it has helped them to meet the news and information needs of a new audience segment, increasing their audience base. Audiences perceive such stories as relevant news and worth sharing with others (Ghodeswar 2008:4). Additionally, because radio online digital brand extensions are secured financially, they are able to hire dedicated staff to handle digital content. This does not give room for multi-tasking that burdens staff. The converged newsroom, while mitigating against the risk of incurring negative signaling costs such as defamation suits because all news content published or aired has undergone editorial review and acceptance, it also reduces the cost of news gathering and cross-checking of facts from news sources for each of the outlets within the group.

Though radio online digital brand extensions were observed in the findings of the study to be engaging with their audiences online and in out-of-studio programmes, increased engagement with audiences was found to be an avenue of potential to aggregate attachment of media audiences to news organisations and subsequently attaining loyalty and customer-based brand equity (CBBE). Customer-based brand equity has been defined by Keller (2009:142) as “the differential effect that consumer knowledge about a brand has on their response to marketing for that brand,” which could be positive or negative based on previous experience with the brand. Radio online digital brand extensions could, therefore, increase their engagement with their audiences because more engagement could translate into increased news diffusion. This is

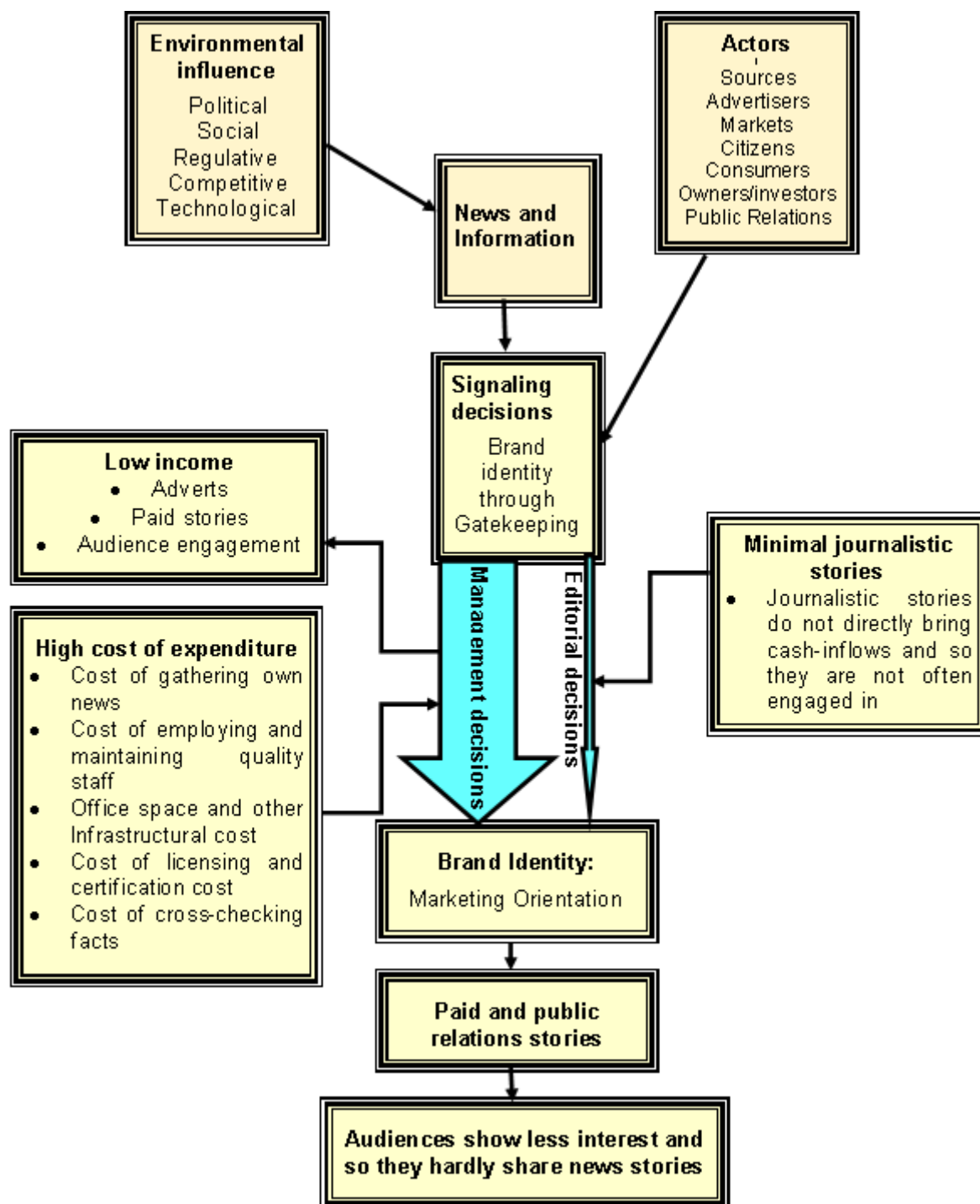


expected to further strengthen their brand position in spite of their current customer base, and the numerous content producers that the digital space has created.

### ***8.3.5 What conceptual framework can guide Ghanaian solely online digital media brands in consolidating their gatekeeping and brand personality building initiatives for greater news diffusion by their audiences?***

As evidenced from the semi-structured interview data in Chapter Seven, solely online news brands may not be as advantaged as their radio online brand extension counterparts. This is largely due to their size and the competitive environment within which they find themselves. Figure 8.2 below is a pictorial representation of the current state of solely online digital media brands, where they have the environmental factors such as the political, social, regulative, competitive and technological forces as well as other actors like sources, advertisers, markets and citizens influencing the kind of news content and signals they produce, much like any other media organisation. Aside from these influences, there is also the burden of low income from advertisements, audience engagement and paid stories. These are needed to service the huge expenditure emanating from the cost of gathering information; the cost of employing and maintaining quality staff; infrastructural costs; cost of licencing and certification; as well as the cost of cross-checking facts. All these are mandatory expenditures required for their existence in the industry. They also require detailed and critical decisions to be made. Due to the fact that finances are low and expenditure is high, solely online digital news organisations are compelled to consider ways and avenues to enhance their finances and ensure sustainability. It is, therefore, not surprising to see the management decisions arrow in Figure 8.8 being bigger and weightier than the editorial decisions arrow. The resultant effect of low income and high expenditure

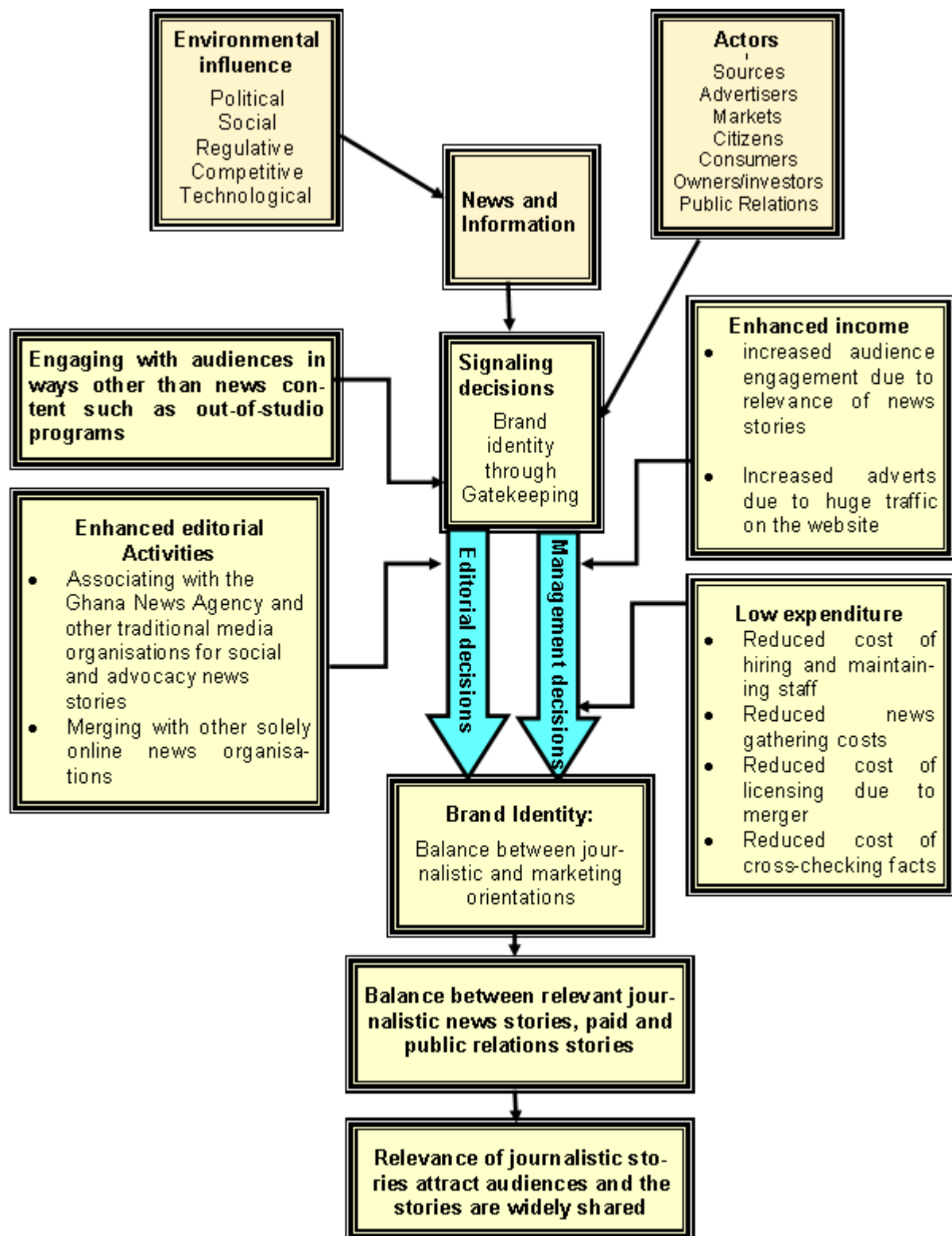
is a marketing brand identity which leads to publishing mostly paid and public relations stories that aid financial in-flows. Most audiences may not show interest in such stories because it may not directly concern them. Thus, as show in the NodeXL network visualisations graphs in Chapter Seven (Figures 7.13 to 7.24), audiences do not visit the websites or Twitter handles to engage with or share such stories to other networks.



**Figure 8.2 Current state of branding of solely online news media organisations in Ghana (Author construct, July 2021)**

To change the narrative for solely online news media organisations, this study proposes a different conceptual framework (Figure 8.3), which could improve their finances and consolidate their gatekeeping activities, while reducing the cost of

expenditure. In this framework, though the influencing factors of news stories remain the same as in Figure 8.2, the signals and news content are different. The conceptual framework suggests that solely online news media outlets could associate or affiliate their news organisations to the Ghana News Agency and other traditional media news organisations for journalistic news feeds. In this way, though they may have access to social and advocacy stories to publish, the cost of employing and maintaining staff, as well as gathering information, will be minimal. Alternatively, or in addition to the above, solely online news media organisations could consider merging or joining forces with other solely online digital media organisations to strengthen their operations.



**Figure 8.3 Conceptual framework to consolidate the gatekeeping activities of solely online news media organisations in Ghana (Author construct, July 2021)**

With the introduction of the above inputs, it is observed that the editorial decisions

arrow in Figure 8.3 has increased in size and the management decisions arrow has shrunk. This is because the expenditure on the minimal income has reduced owing to a reduction in the cost of employing and maintaining quality staff, news gathering, licencing due to mergers, cross-checking facts, etc. Also, once audiences observe that the news on such solely online digital news platforms are relevant to them, traffic to the website increases, resulting in companies and other organisations placing adverts with them. In effect, engagement with audiences increases, which reflects in enhanced income due to audience engagement and a longer stay online. Such a balanced decision making could result in a balanced brand identity orientation between the paid and journalistic stories, ultimately, leading to relevance of content which audiences will share to enhance news diffusion.

#### **8.4 The overarching theme**

From the literature review (Chapters Two to Four), the theory discussions (Chapter Five), the findings presented in Chapter Seven, and the discussions preceding this section of this chapter, the researcher derived an overarching theme, which summarises the whole thesis as follows:

- News media branding: towards a 'glocalised' or 'cosmolocalism' gatekeeping approach.

This theme summarises the approach to news media branding by individual media organisations. Globally, when there is mention of gatekeeping within the media fraternity, there is a general understanding of what it means and what goes into it. However, the means of execution or implementation vary based on a number of factors. In Chapter Five, there were discussions on various gatekeeping models that

have evolved based on technological transformation and the need to adapt models to rope in new content producers that are created with the advancement in technology. It was observed that Shoemaker and Reese's (1991; 1996; 2014) models served to outline various influencers of news media content and this has been the foundation to contemporary and digital gatekeeping modelling. Their five influencers being the individual, news routines, organisational, social organisations or extra media, and the social systems levels. All these exert varying levels of influence on their activities, with the social systems having the greatest and the individual level having the least influence.

Aside from the general gatekeeping principles, media organisations have their mission or purpose which influences the kind of programmes they run and how they want society to see them. This, in turn, influences the choice of words and other critical details of their programming activities. Additionally, this defines the kind of house style, as well as other principles and rules that they put together to guide their activities. These factors vary from media organisation to media organisation. From the findings, it was realised that all the radio online digital media brands sampled had some things in common. For example, all news content on the digital outlets were churned out from the common newsroom that served both traditional and digital. They also championed social and advocacy news more than public relations or paid stories. Additionally, all traditional media outlets had their own social media channels to engage their audiences on live programmes.

However, other activities were media organisation-specific. For instance, it was realised that *myjoyonline.com* and their parent brand *Multimedia* had an online first policy, which meant every news story first had to be published on the digital brand before the traditional brand. This was unique to them. Also, for their brand, no individual had the right to post images or videos for fun, rather, staff have to post content from the traditional media entertainment channel (Joy Prime). This is a policy that is unique to *Multimedia* and has helped to build their desired brand over the years. *Citifmonline* also had a policy to always use infographics to simplify complex issues in the news stories for their audiences. These specific policies and rules define how media organisations go about their gatekeeping activities and, ultimately, it defines how they want to be seen by their audiences and society at large.

Among the online news media gatekeepers, it was found that, because their survival depended largely on their income which was limited to advertisements (which were minimal) and their ability to keep their audiences online for a long period, most of their stories were selected with their sustenance in mind. A single news story could be taken from different angles and written as separate stories in the name of trying to keep audiences online for extended periods of time. Sometimes the headlines may serve as click bait (Blom & Hansen 2015), for audiences to read content that may not have any bearing on the sensational headline put across.

From the foregoing, it is evident that media organisations have a context-driven or localised approach to achieving their branding through gatekeeping, though their activities also had global implications. As a result, branding through gatekeeping



activities should be done through the lens of the influencers of news content as identified by Shoemaker and Reese (1991; 1996; 2014) and, more especially, the digital gatekeeping models as developed Wallace (2018), which are relevant in the networked system established by the digital media transformation. Aside from their individual socialisation and orientation, there are organisational styles and policies, national laws and policies, as well as international laws and policies that define media content production. Thus, media content production should be done in the context of these array of policies.

### **8.5 Summary**

This chapter has discussed the findings presented in Chapter Seven by giving meaning to the findings from the network visualisation graphical representation of audiences' activities on Twitter and the thematic data from the semi-structured interviews to answer the research questions posed in Chapter One. This helped to conceptualise the findings regarding the gatekeeping, signalling and branding strategies of news media outlets in the digital era. The chapter further proposed one conceptual framework each to help consolidate the gatekeeping activities of radio online digital brands and solely online digital news outlets. Finally, the chapter derived one overarching theme, which served to summarise the approach to news media branding in Ghana. Though there is a general understanding of gatekeeping, media outlets had their house style in terms of approaches to gatekeeping and making choices to brand their news organisations. These organisational objectives, decisions and choices ultimately have global implications. As such, gatekeeping activities by media organisations should be done with their organisational, national and international media laws and policies in mind.

## CHAPTER NINE

### CONCLUSIONS

#### 9.1 Introduction

This study sought to investigate how news media organisations employed their gatekeeping activities in building their brand identities and how the brands built help to diffuse their news stories among their audiences on digital platforms. To achieve this, the study performed a comparative assessment of what happened in three sampled radio online brand extensions. namely, *myjoyonline.com*, *peacefmonline.com* and *citifmonline.com* against that of three solely online news media outlets, that is, *modernghana.com*, *newsghana24.com* and *mynewsghana.net*. Using a qualitatively driven mixed-methods research and an interpretivist approach, this study deployed the NodeXL software to graphically analyse network visualisations of the activities of audiences of the six sampled news outlets within their Twitter social media handles. From Chapter Four, it was discovered that the interface of Twitter, which permits news organisations to use minimal words (280 words) or just links, images and videos, had rendered itself a 'newsful' social media platform which effectively routes audiences to news websites. Additionally, it is a platform that makes it easy for media audiences to tweet, retweet, mention or even send news links and other news information to their networks. There was also thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews data which was gathered from Online News Editors, Social Media Managers and Social Media Curators of the six sampled news organisations.

This chapter provides a summary of the eight preceding chapters by providing a succinct overview of the discussions in each chapter. The chapter also identifies associated limitations, makes recommendations which the researcher hopes could

consolidate gatekeeping for media branding and, finally, provides thematic direction for future research on the topic.

## **9.2 Summary of chapters: structure and synthesis**

At the emergence of digital media, traditional media was conceptualised to experience extinction. Rather than being a threat, however, traditional media forms have harnessed the benefits of digital media. It has allowed them to enhance their gatekeeping and signalling activities to build their brand and diffuse their news widely in areas that, ordinarily, they may not be able to reach. Added to that, gatekeeping was conceptualised to be in a state of transition in the digital era. However, general cognisance observation proves that its relevance in the digital era makes it a means through which media outlets are able to brand themselves and position their outlets in accordance with how they want audiences and society at large to know them and what they stand for. With this background, Chapter One of this thesis was devoted to introducing the topic and giving a brief description of the problem under investigation. The chapter contextualised the study within the Ghanaian broadcasting setting, with emphasis on radio, and giving justification for the relevance of the study, with the attendant objectives and research questions that guided the study. Here, a brief outline of the research method undertaken was provided, noting that the study was situated within the interpretivist paradigm, with justification of why it was expedient to approach it from this paradigm using a qualitatively-driven mixed-methods approach. Finally, a brief outlay of how the thesis has been structured was presented to provide a smooth following and unfolding of information.

Together, Chapters Two to Four made up the literature review of this thesis since they assessed the relevant literature on various concepts related to the study. Chapter Two discussed the shift in paradigm in radio broadcasting from an era of one-way communication to an era where much attention is paid to audiences by interacting with them in a networked and virtual environment. The chapter discussed the evolution of the gatekeeping theory, attributing the transformation of gatekeeping models to new media paradigms that challenged existing gatekeeping theories, making old models inadequate to analyse new gatekeeping functions and roles. Additionally, it was revealed that, gatekeeping theory evolution has been necessitated by a need to rope in new content producers that emerged with the internet, technological advancement and new media advantages. Added to that, the important role played by traditional news media outlets and their online digital brand extensions in the digital era was discussed. It noted their role, which is quite central to credible news propagation and projects their normative responsibilities to society which cannot be role-played by audiences no matter how much they strive. By maintaining professional standards in the face of stiff competition from online news media gatekeepers and public/citizen/online users as news sources, traditional media outlets have earned brand identities that audiences always want to associate with. The brand power and advantages that traditional media gatekeepers, especially in the radio space, commanded and conveyed onto the new media environment were also discussed as additions to the online digital brand extension which was not found with online news media gatekeepers or public/citizen/online user gatekeepers.

The chapter also discussed the triggerers of news diffusion online and on social media platforms from the angles of sender traits, attitudes and habits, as well as message

characteristics. Finally, the unique interface and characteristics that the Twitter platform presents, which makes it the premium choice of social media for news diffusion, was discussed noting that the 280-character content creation limit was effective in routing traffic to the news website of news media outlets. Thus, lending itself as a comparably 'newsful' platform than other social media platforms.

Chapter Three discussed the concept of brand and how news media brand management helps to achieve customer-based brand equity. It was observed that branding was relatively new to the media fraternity, requiring media branding to explicitly or implicitly draw on marketing communication models to conceptualise media brands into five perspectives. Thus, perceiving brand as a product, an extension, an identity, a differentiation and an equity. Media branding, which presents itself as star power, slogans, logo and special effects, has been necessitated by the intense audience-attention competition, competing products, converged technologies and audience fragmentation brought about by globalisation, digitisation of media and interactive technologies in the multi-channel and digital era. The advantages that branding presents to both the media organisation and its audiences were discussed.

The chapter focused attention on online brand extensions of radio, as a strategy to rope in new media audiences and to meet the news needs of netizens, while, at the same time, addressing the competition it finds itself in, in the wake of the internet, technological advancement and new media advantages. It was noted that radio online digital brand extensions continue to perform the normative gatekeeping roles and functions known on traditional radio which have distinguished them from the numerous

news channels, thus, earning them many followers on the digital space. This normative gatekeeping now serves as a brand identity tool, brand power and a credibility instrument catalysing the diffusion of the news stories of radio online digital brand extensions within the personal networks of their audiences.

The chapter also considered media branding, observing that it presents critical decision-making for media managers regarding the marketing/business/commercialization decisions, on the one hand, and the editorial/journalistic decisions, on the other hand. While these were found to be in contention, the ability to draw a balance between them dictated the media identity or personality projected to media audiences. The chapter finally discussed the concept of brand personality. It noted that good media brand personality positions the media outlet or product well to achieve the much-needed customer-based brand equity which guarantees a wide distribution of the news products of the news outlets in the digital media environment.

The fourth chapter, themed as '*Modelling brand personality: the gatekeeping factor*' explored the concept of brand personality, as has been applied in consumer product marketing, and then narrowed it down to the media fraternity. It surveyed a number of models used in media brand literature, detailing the dimensions that made up brand personality, as theorised by various scholars within the field. The chapter then delved into the considerations made in building brand personality models and their attendant dimensions with a focus on theoretical foundations and implications. It was evident from the various brand personality models studied that brand personality dimensions

were essentially human traits and characteristics attributed to various products based on how consumers and, in this sense, media audiences viewed a media brand. Subsequently, these models were developed through empirical studies and later models wholly or partially depended on previous models for traits, facets and dimensions, without strong theoretical underpinnings. The chapter, in consonance with previous research, argued that human characteristics alone provide inadequate theoretical underpinnings for brand personality building. However, theoretically driven and empirically supported dimensions also need to be considered (Austin, Sigauw & Mattilla 2003; Berens & van Riel 2004; Davies et al 2018:116). Based on this position, the chapter proposed that gatekeeping, which defines the decisions and activities of how a media brand wants to be perceived and how their audiences also perceive them, should be considered. Gatekeeping serves as a signal through content creation. As proposed by Davies et al (2018:115), it is theoretically driven and empirically tested, enhancing its relevance as a brand personality dimension under signalling theory (Connelly, Certo, Ireland & Reutzel 2011; Spence 1973).

Chapter Five was dedicated to discussions into the theoretical underpinnings of the study. The study was hinged on signalling theory (Spence 1973) and gatekeeping theory. Signalling theory was noted to be applied in a number of areas such as economics, anthropology, advertising and marketing. The key concepts of signalling theory (Spence 1973) being the signaller or trustee, the signal and the receiver or truster, were discussed. The signaller often possesses information about the quality of news programming and alerts the receiver or truster about this quality through a signal. Once the signal is positively interpreted by the receiver or truster, a feedback

is sent to the signaller in the form of time spent listening, watching or logging onto the media outlet.

The gatekeeping theory was also delved into, focusing on the prominent representation of traditional mass media outlets such as radio. It was observed that, though traditional media was anticipated to be rendered extinct by technological advancements and the internet, they have rather stood up to the challenge by converging their services with new media, thus, increasing their relevance. It was made clear that gatekeeping goes beyond the 'in' and 'out' movement of information to mean every process of transforming raw data into information or news. Various gatekeeping models were discussed from contemporary and conventional models to digital and networked gatekeeping models. As such, emphasising the inadequacies of existing models to serve as analytic frameworks for innovations that technology and the internet provided over time. This was argued as the basis and background to the many gatekeeping models which were discussed individually.

Credit was given to Lewin's (1947) field theory, which charts the path for gatekeeping theorisation, emphasising the influence of gatekeepers and the environment on decision making in various channels of food distribution. This landmark study, which proposed a possible application of gatekeeping in other fields, was seen to have influenced White's (1950) ground-breaking gatekeeping study in the media. Though critiqued as overly simplified and significantly departing from Lewin's (1947) original study, White's (1950) study and modelling of gatekeeping in the media paved the way for further media gatekeeping studies. Shoemaker's (1991) Hierarchy of Influences model, which she later co-authored with Reese in 1996 and 2014, suggested a return



to Lewin's (1943) field theory. They proposed five levels of influence that take into account the multivariate forces that interact with each other and simultaneously impinge on media content. These are the individual, routine, organisational, social institution and social systems levels. These contemporary gatekeeping models were identified to project the unidirectional flow of information from media organisations to audiences, emphasising the gatekeeping roles and functions of traditional media.

The chapter again discussed digital and network gatekeeping models which have been proposed as a panacea to the changing media landscape due to technologically-driven advancements. It was noted that "it makes little sense to study a changing landscape with methods developed to study printed newspapers in the pre-computer era" (Shoemaker and Vos 2009:130). In view of this, Shoemaker and Vos' (2009) holistic gatekeeping theory was discussed, along with Chin-Fook and Simmonds' (2011) multidirectional flow validations, as well as Wallace's (2018) digital gatekeeping model. It was observed that though these models take into account the multichannel digital environment with active participation of audiences, blogs and other content producers, they cannot exist without the foundation laid by conventional gatekeeping models, hence, the prominent representation of traditional media. The normative gatekeeping functions and roles of traditional media were seen to be relevant and prominent, even on the digital platform to serve as credible news sources. This affirms Wallace's (2018) position that, the platform chosen dictates the specific gatekeeping mechanisms applied and, ultimately, the visibility of the published content.

By drawing on brand personality building strategies and gatekeeping modelling, the chapter finally proposed a conceptual framework on media gatekeeping and signalling

in the digital era. This framework served as the basis for designing the interviews guides which were used for data collection, analysis and data presentation in this study.

Chapter Six presented a detailed explication of the research philosophy, processes, methods and strategies adopted to execute this study. A mixed-methods research approach executed from a largely qualitative perspective and interpretivist paradigm was found to be suitable for the study, propelling an interpretive perspective to data analysis and discussions. This was justified on the merit that while both quantitative and qualitative methodologies took centre-stage in data collection and analysis, interpretation and discussion was largely qualitative using an interpretive viewpoint. Quantitative methods, thus, assumed an 'auxiliary' or supportive role to plot network visualisation graphs of audiences' activities in news diffusion in the Twitter social media network.

The data collection methods adopted for this study included quantitative graphical representation of media audiences' news diffusion activities through tweets, retweets and mentions on Twitter via the NodeXL software. This helped to measure the extent of diffusion of links to news stories and headlines in the personal network of media audiences. This was followed by semi-structured interviews with online news editors, social media managers and social media curators of six purposively sampled online news media outlets. These were, *peacefmonline.com*, *myjoyonline.com*, *citifmonline.com*, *modernghana.com*, *newsghana24.com* and *mynewsghana.net*. The data generated was analysed inductively using thematic analysis.

Like all other studies, mixed-methods studies need to be conducted with the issues of quality and rigour in mind. Because this mixed-methods study was qualitatively driven, the quality criteria adopted were largely qualitative. Measures to ensure that the four-criterion construct of trustworthiness and authenticity, that is, credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability, were outlined. Strategies to ensure the validity and credibility of quantitative data collected were also discussed. The final section of this chapter discussed the researcher's role in carrying out this study. It was found that credibility in qualitatively-driven mixed-methods research is enhanced when the researcher does not introduce bias into both data collection and analysis. As much as practical, the researcher's prejudice was minimised in order to achieve objectivity. The findings can, therefore, be considered as a valid and credible normative Ghanaian contextual contribution to gatekeeping literature.

Chapter Seven presented the data analysis procedures and findings of the study as derived from the network visualisation graphical analysis of Twitter data using the NodeXL software, as well as the semi-structured interviews data. The Twitter data, which was attended to first, helped to generate 24 distinct network visualisation graphs for the six online digital news brands. Data was gathered for each week within one-month (Twitter allows for seven days information generation), generating four graphs for each of the news outlets. The next phase was the analysis of the data from the semi-structured interviews. The study initially purported to collect data from 18 media professionals from the six sampled digital news outlets. However, there was a deficit of three interviews because *modernghana.com* did not have a Social Media Curator and *newsghana24.com* only had an Online News Editor who multitasked for all other positions. Data from the semi-structured interviews were engaged inductively based

on categories derived from the conceptual framework formulated in Chapter Five to generate themes and sub-themes. Each data collection instrument was treated distinctively in a systematic order. Additionally, online news media gatekeepers were treated separately from traditional media gatekeepers to help ascertain the similarities and differences between their various gatekeeping and branding strategies.

It was established that digital media gatekeeping for radio online digital brand extensions was similar to that of solely online digital media. However, they had their various unique activities that distinguished them. Radio online digital brand extensions often relied on the brand credibility of their parent company built over years, to brand their online brand extensions. Thus, they maintain a converged newsroom for the traditional media outlets and the online brand extension. As such, the same news content produced on the traditional media outlet like radio is published on their website and social media handles. To increase audience accessibility of their news and in effect improve their news diffusion, traditional media gatekeepers kept separate social media accounts for each traditional media outlet as well as the website to create a vast array of news and information channels for their audiences. This did not only increase their news outlets, but also guaranteed a wide diffusion of their news stories to all segments of audiences. The size of traditional media organisations with online brand extensions was found to serve as an advantage for their survival because their income flows from various sources and the traffic they route to their website gives them leverage to receive digital advertisements for their websites. Radio online digital brand extensions were found not to often engage in paid stories, but instead favouring social, advocacy and general news content meant to inform their audiences. Their branding strategy was found to be largely consistent with the journalistic branding

orientation.

For online digital media brand gatekeepers, it was observed that their media organisations were smaller in size, compared to traditional media gatekeepers, with as few as between one and five employees. They were found to be less financially and capital resourced, depending largely on income generated through audience engagement online for their survival. Their survival strategy was found to dictate the kind of stories they engaged in, which were often crafted with catchy headlines, attractive framings and suggestive images that explicitly or implicitly attracted audiences' attention to stay longer online. Their branding strategy was found to largely conform to the commercial or management branding orientation, which considered monetary gain for the sustenance of the media brand over the relevance of the news stories or audience information needs.

Chapter Eight dealt with discussions of the findings presented in the previous chapter to help address the research questions that underpinned the study and to give meaning to the data. This helped to conceptualise the findings regarding the gatekeeping, signalling and branding strategies of news media outlets in the digital era by developing a conceptual framework to consolidate the gatekeeping activities of radio online digital brand extensions and solely online digital news brands. The chapter further derived one overarching theme, which summarised the findings of the study in seeking the extent that the gatekeeping activities performed by radio online digital brand extensions compared to that of online news media outlets, additionally examining how effective these activities were in routing audience traffic to online news websites. It also sought to respond to the extent to which the presence of Ghanaian

radio online digital brand extension gatekeepers' on Twitter influenced their news diffusion within the personal networks of their audiences compared with those of Ghanaian online digital news media gatekeepers without traditional media affiliation.

The overarching theme was:

- News media branding: towards a 'glocalised' or 'cosmolocalism' gatekeeping approach.

This theme is a summation of the approach to news media branding. Globally, there is a general understanding of what gatekeeping is and how it should be done. However, media organisations have their own house style, other principles and rules that guide their activities. This tends to define the choices they make in the news processes and their programming in general. Ultimately, it defines how they want to be seen by their audiences and society at large. It also delineates how to achieve their mission and brand expectation of the news outlet.

Chapter Nine, being the final chapter, summarises all the chapters of this thesis, projecting how this study has contributed to the gatekeeping and media branding literature in Ghana. The chapter provides recommendations on how media outlets can consolidate their gatekeeping activities to achieve their media branding objectives. Finally, based on the findings, the thesis has provided some avenues for further research in the future.

### **9.3 Recommendations**

Considering the above findings, the following recommendations are made for online

news media gatekeepers, on the one hand, and traditional media gatekeepers, on the other hand:

- 1 The researcher suggests extensive education for media practitioners on how gatekeeping or the choices they make as part of their work routines impact the image they project concerning their media organisations and in effect their brand identity or personality.
- 2 With the weak financial base of online news media gatekeepers in view, the study recommends that online news media gatekeepers should enter into partnerships with other media organisations and affiliate with traditional media organisations and the Ghana News Agency to increase their journalistic news content base and their relevance to the community they serve. This will not only increase their financial base, but will also make them highly competitive, reduce their production costs, and their news will not only be financially motivated but audience centred as well.
- 3 Traditional media gatekeepers have a theoretically and empirically tested approach of remaining relevant in spite of the changing seasons within the media space. Even in the digital era, traditional media news organisations rely on the known editorial processes of their newsroom to churn out news stories. While this study emphasises and encourages the continuation of such an approach, it further recommends that radio online digital brand extensions should intensify their audience engagement to improve their customer-based brand equity (CBBE) and gain the loyalty of their audiences.

#### **9.4 Limitations of the study**

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, however, it was largely approached from a qualitative perspective with the quantitative aspect serving an auxiliary role in the plotting of network visualisations of audience activities in the Twitter handles of the news outlets sampled. Plotting network visualisation graphs did not give room to test for reliability and validity of the quantitative data, especially because it was social media data. However, network matrices calculated, such as Betweenness Centrality, Closeness Centrality, Eigenvector Centrality, In-degree and Out-degree of the various graphs, helped to ascertain how the news media organisation influenced news diffusion on the digital platforms. Additionally, because interpretation and analysis were largely qualitative, every effort was made to ensure that data gathered and analysed were trustworthy and authentic, as detailed in Chapter Six.

The study was guided by the interpretivist paradigm, which is a relativism movement and, thus, suggests that reality is socially constructed and mentally oriented. Interpretivists believe that, there are multiple realities constructed by social actors (Bagele & Kawulich 2012:9; Scotland 2012:11), and that these multiple realities are based on individual perception, understanding and experiences. Additionally, they believe that “sense [is made] of reality in different ways depending on an individual’s unique background and experiences” (Pole 2007:1). Findings from this study have been based on the individual experiences of interviewees from the six sampled online news media organisations and do not claim universality. The researcher, however, holds that despite the limitations of qualitative study, it was the most appropriate



paradigm to approach this mixed-methods study because of the exploratory nature of the study which needed methodologies like interviews to unearth information and also remain insightful.

The above limitations notwithstanding, the study has made significant contributions towards theory building and the media branding literature from a gatekeeping theorisation perspective. These limitations are surmountable with further research into other areas, as indicated in the next sub-section.

### **9.5 Suggestions for further research**

This study has been an eye-opener because it has provided extensive understanding of issues of branding by media outlets, more so, from the gatekeeping perspective. Much as the study is elaborative, the researcher does not claim the findings of the study to be a complete and comprehensive account on the topic. Through the literature review, theoretical analysis, data collection through interviews and on Twitter, some answers to the limitations identified could be achieved through further studies, based on the new insights gained. Some of the avenues identified include, but are not limited to the following:

First, the researcher suggests extensive study of how gatekeeping in media impacts media branding. Gatekeeping theorisation in the media has evolved from White's (1950) seminal study to date. However, its relation to media branding has received little or no attention. Such a study could be looked at from different media genres. This study concentrated on digital media platforms and established that, indeed, there is a

connection between media gatekeeping and media branding, as well as between media branding and news diffusion. With this fundamental finding, the frontiers of the study could be elaborated. It is obvious that studies in this regard are limited and need further elaboration and unearthing.

Second is that, media brand modelling and dimension building, like its parent studies in marketing, has been largely based on empirical studies. And the measurement items have been found to be parallel, similar or slightly different from those used in previous scales, but only given different labels (Davies et al 2018:115; Kim 2018:204). While the homogeneity of the brand personality dimensions and measurement items may not seem very critical, the issue has been the lack of theoretical foundations for the construct [of brand personality dimensions]; and the overly large number of dimensions being discovered (Ashton, Lee, Goldberg & de Vries 2009; Davies et al 2018:115; Musek 2007). It has been established that, scale development should be informed by a theoretical understanding of what is to be measured (Churchill 1979) to ensure that the measurement items indeed measure the dimension they purport to measure. To achieve universality in the conclusions on brand personality modelling (Davis et al 2018:120), especially in media studies, this study suggests a move towards theoretical structuring and underpinning of brand personality characterisation and media brand building, similar to what this study has achieved.

## **9.6 Contributions of the study**

The study has contributed to the body of literature on gatekeeping theorisation and its application in media branding, especially in Ghana. The study has dealt with the

question of the importance of normative gatekeeping. In particular, it examined online digital news platforms, which is an environment where news channels and content producers abound, and some content producers may not be willing to take on the extra responsibility of confirming content before publication.

By placing emphasis on the quest to build brand image, identity and personality for their media outlets in the digital era, the study set out to find out what motivates journalists, especially in the traditional media settings, to hold on to their normative gatekeeping in the brand-building process. This came as a surprise to some respondents in the study because they never drew any association between the two. This study was, thus, an eye-opener and education to media organisations, which the study believed will place significant importance to their daily decisions and choices henceforth, as far as their work routines are concerned.

The conceptual framework developed in Chapter Five is an amalgamation of gatekeeping theory and signalling theory, which can be applied in the brand building literature, not only for media organisations, but also be adapted into other areas. The conceptual frameworks developed uniquely for radio online digital brand extensions and solely online digital news brands in Chapter Eight could be implemented to assess their applicability in gatekeeping and branding.

## **9.7 Summary**

This chapter concludes the study by giving a synopsis of the chapters in terms of structuring as well as a synthesis of the discussions in each of them. The contributions of this study to the literature on media branding, gatekeeping and signalling theory

have been outlined. It has emphasised that the study had considered the issue of media branding from a gatekeeping perspective and how this is signalled to audiences. In the process, media audiences accept the brand and help in news diffusion.

The limitations to the study have been discussed, noting the non-universality of the findings, as well as the limitations that qualitative studies posed to mixed-methods studies. Efforts were made by the researcher to suppress the biases associated with qualitative studies by being as objective as possible, against the backdrop that it was the best approach to this exploratory study. By the subjective nature of the outcomes, the findings are only limited to the six online news brands of the six news organisations sampled and cannot claim universal application.

Finally, the chapter recommended various actions for news media organisations with digital outlets, that is, both traditional media affiliated and non-traditional media affiliated, noting a partnership for online news media gatekeepers to strengthen their finances and, ultimately, their journalistic publications. For radio online digital brand extensions, the study recommended enhanced audience engagement to increase customer-based brand equity and customer loyalty. Avenues for further research were also provided.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **BROAD LEVEL ENQUIRY THAT GUIDED THE PREPARATION OF THE INTERVIEWS SCHEDULES**

The goal of this level of enquiry was to gain insight through interaction with the Online News Editors, Social Media Curators and Social Media Managers of the sampled online digital media brands to ascertain how they used their gatekeeping routines to build brands for their news organisations and how these brands built help to diffuse their news stories on the Twitter and other digital networks.

The broad areas that the interview schedules covered included the outline below. These broad areas served as a guide to prepare detailed interview schedules for the various positions. There were three separate interview schedules, one each for Online News Editors, Social Media Managers and Social Media Curators. The questions were varied as and when required.

- 1 The differences and similarities between the gatekeeping roles and functions of traditional media gatekeepers and online news media gatekeepers on the online and social media platforms.
- 2 What informs the choices of news stories and headlines or pictures put on social media.
- 3 How online digital news media outlets get their audiences to buy into their brand.
- 4 The means by which online digital news brands got their audiences active through engagement and interaction.
- 5 How gatekeeping for brand personality building by radio online brand extensions differed from those of solely online news media platforms without traditional media affiliations.

## APPENDIX B

### DETAILED SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ONLINE NEWS EDITORS

- 1 How long have you been working as an Online News Editor for your organisation?
- 2 What is your exact duty or job description as an Online News Editor?
- 3 How long has your online news website existed/When was the online news website established.
- 4 How has the online digital and social media landscape affected your communication practices with your audiences as a media organisation?
- 5 How have your internal structures and processes been transformed to respond to the digital and social media environment? (for radio brand extensions only)
- 6 How have your employees, middle management and top level executives responded to these changes?
- 7 At what level are training programmes organised for responding to the needs of the online digital platforms and social media handles?
- 8 What is the frequency of such training programmes?
- 9 How have your employees, middle management and top level executives responded to these changes?
- 10 How different is gatekeeping on the online digital media platform from that of traditional radio? (for radio brand extensions only)
- 11 How similar is gatekeeping on the online digital media brand to that of traditional radio? (for radio brand extensions only)
- 12 How do you plan and release content on your website and social media?
- 13 Where does the decision making on content to be placed on the online digital brand extension take place?
- 14 What goes into such decision making/do you have particular defining criteria for such decision making?

- 15 How much initiative is allowed to the online news editor in deciding what should be placed on the website and Twitter?
- 16 How different are the stories you carry on your website and social media different from that of your traditional radio?
- 17 Do you have a particular target audience in mind when you post stories on your website and Twitter?
- 18 What are your views on brand personality for news media organisations?
- 19 Would you consider the type of gatekeeping you do as a positive influencer to your brand position?
- 20 From your own assessment, what brand personality does your online digital news platform and Twitter handle command?
- 21 How do you communicate your brand to your audiences on your website?
- 22 What type of stories do you publish to get the attention of your audiences to engage with you?
- 23 In your estimation, how readily do your audiences accept or embrace your brand?
- 24 Do you consider the type of stories you publish as purely journalistic or those that will increase the finances of your organisation?
- 25 Does the survival of your online digital news outlet depend solely on adverts and news stories you publish online?



## APPENDIX C

### DETAILED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SOCIAL MEDIA CURATORS

- 1 How long have you been working as a Social Media Curator for your organisation?
- 2 What is your exact duty or job description as a Social Media Curator?
- 3 How has the online digital and social media landscape affected your communication practices with your audiences as a media organisation?
- 4 How have your internal structures and processes been transformed to respond to the digital and social media environment? (for radio brand extensions only)
- 5 How have your employees, middle management and top-level executives responded to these changes?
- 6 At what level are training programmes organised for responding to the needs of the online digital platforms and social media handles?
- 7 What is the frequency of such training programmes?
- 8 How do you plan and release content on your website and social media?
- 9 How do you define content strategy?
- 10 Do you consider your content strategy on social media as a part of brand building for your online media outlet?
- 11 Where does the decision making on content to be placed on Twitter take place?
- 12 What goes into such decision making?
- 13 Do you have particular defining criteria for such decision making?
- 14 What influences your type of stories and pictures on Twitter?
- 15 How much initiative is allowed to the social media curator in deciding what should be placed on Twitter?
- 16 Do you consider so much absolute freedom in content release, based on your own initiative or what the audiences expect?

- 17 What type of stories do you publish on Twitter to get the attention of your audiences to engage with you?
- 18 How often do you interact with or engage your audiences on Twitter?
- 19 What other social media accounts do you operate?
- 20 Do you consider the type of stories you publish as purely journalistic or those that will increase the finances of your organisation?
- 21 Does the survival of your online digital news outlet depend solely on adverts and news stories you publish online?
- 22 How different are the stories your carry on your website and social media different from that of your traditional radio?
- 23 Do you have a particular target audience in mind when you post stories on your organisation's Twitter handle?
- 24 What are your views on the brand personality of your news media organisation?
- 25 Would you consider the type of gatekeeping you do as a positive influencer to your brand position?
- 26 From your own assessment, what brand personality does your Twitter handle command?
- 27 How do you communicate your brand to your audiences on your Twitter handle?
- 28 In your estimation, how readily do your audiences accept or embrace your brand?
- 29 Do you have a way of checking how your audiences carry your news stories on Twitter?
- 30 What is your impression on the output of your news diffusion on Twitter?
- 31 What type of stories do you publish to get the attention of your audiences to engage with you?

32 Do you have a dedicated staff to handle audiences' engagement on social media?

## APPENDIX D

### DETAILED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGERS

- 1 How long have you been working as a Social Media Manager for your organisation?
- 2 What is your exact duty or job description as a Social Media Manager?
- 3 How has the online digital and social media landscape affected your communication practices with your audiences as a media organisation?
- 4 How have your internal structures and processes been transformed to respond to the digital and social media environment? (for radio brand extensions only)
- 5 How have your employees, middle management and top level executives responded to these changes?
- 6 At what level are training programmes organised for responding to the needs of the online digital platforms and social media handles?
- 7 What is the frequency of such training programmes?
- 8 How do you plan and release content on your website and social media?
- 9 How much initiative is allowed to the social media manager in deciding what should be placed on Twitter?
- 10 Do you have so much absolute freedom in content release, based on your own initiative or what the audiences expect?
- 11 Do you consider your content strategy on social media as a part of brand building for your online media outlet?
- 12 Where does the decision making on content to be placed on Twitter take place?
- 13 What goes into such decision making?
- 14 Do you have particular defining criteria for such decision making?
- 15 What influences your type of stories and pictures on Twitter?
- 16 What type of stories do you publish on Twitter to get the attention of your audiences to engage with you?

- 17 How often do you interact with or engage your audiences on Twitter?
- 18 What other social media accounts do you operate?
- 19 Do you consider the type of stories you publish as purely journalistic or those that will increase the finances of your organisation?
- 20 Does the survival of your online digital news outlet depend solely on adverts and news stories you publish online?
- 21 How different are the stories you carry on your website and social media different from that of your traditional radio?
- 22 How will you classify the stories and pictures do you carry on your social media Twitter platform?
- 23 Do you have a particular target audience in mind when you post stories on your organisation's Twitter handle?
- 24 What are your views on the brand personality of your news media organisation?
- 25 How do you consider the brand personality of your news outlet?
- 26 How do you position this brand personality to your audiences?
- 27 Would you consider the type of gatekeeping you do as a positive influencer to your brand position?
- 28 From your own assessment, what brand personality does your Twitter handle command?
- 29 How do you communicate your brand to your audiences on your Twitter handle?
- 30 In your estimation, how readily do your audiences accept or embrace your brand?
- 31 Do you have a way of checking how your audiences carry your news stories on Twitter?
- 32 What is your impression on the output of your news diffusion on Twitter?
- 33 Do you consider your audiences as good propagators of your media outlet?

- 34 What type of stories do you publish to get the attention of your audiences to engage with you?
- 35 Do you have a dedicated staff to handle audiences' engagement on social media?
- 36 In what ways do you engage your audiences on Twitter?
- 37 How often do you engage your audiences on Twitter?
- 38 Do you have a dedicated staff to handle audiences' interaction and engagement on Twitter?